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Larsen, Jeppe Fuglsang

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BY
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Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

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PhD supervisor: Associate Prof. Sune Qvotrup Jensen
Aalborg University

PhD committee: Lektor Kathrine Vitus
Aalborg University (chairman)

Professor Lasse Lindekilde
Aarhus University

Professor Sveinung Sandberg
Universitety of Oslo

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

This dissertation offers an understanding and theorization of the attraction of radical Islamism in the West through theoretical perspectives that combine different levels of explanation of radicalization. The dissertation consists of five research articles, which are synthesized in these summary chapters.

Article 1 ("Jihadism from a Subcultural Perspective") discusses the relevance of a subcultural approach to the study of jihadism. It argues that part of the attraction of jihadism can be understood by viewing jihadism as a subculture that provides an answer to problems pertaining to participants' shared social position. Furthermore, the article argues that a subcultural approach to jihadism enables an analysis of one of the hybrid forms of cultural expression central to jihadi subculture, namely jihadi rap music. The article suggests that jihadi rap is a way to express resistance through a creative cultural bricolage of different and often contradictory cultural styles, and that jihadi rap can be interpreted as the explicit manifestation of a broader collective, oppositional, and subcultural answer to a shared situation of experienced othering.

Article 2 ("Rap, Islam, jihadi cool: A contribution to understanding the subcultural attractions of Western jihadi subculture") seeks to explain (part of) what makes jihadi subculture attractive by analyzing the historical relationship between hip-hop and Islam. The article traces the employment of Islam in hip-hop to recent developments of jihadi rap. Within jihadi rap, we observe a form of bricolage that mixes and combines hip-hop musical style, the symbolism of US Black Islam, and jihadism, and the article argues that this type of stylistic appropriation of hip-hop coolness is part of what makes jihadi rap – and, in a broader sense, jihadi subculture – aesthetically and stylistic cool and therefore attractive.

Article 3 ("Reinstating and contextualizing religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization in the West") seeks to reinstate religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization. It argues that radicalization research is characterized by an analytical deadlock between opposing positions explaining Islamist radicalization primarily through structural factors versus primarily through specific interpretations of Islam. The article introduces and develops an analytical perspective that enables a synthesis between these opposing positions as it offers a way to understand how social and political contexts can be connected to religiosity. It provides an understanding of how emotions, such as anger towards society, can be transformed into strong religious emotions in radical Islamist groups, which in some cases can initiate and amplify religiously-based motivations to endorse or commit violence, and how radical Islamism offers an order of emotions that can be experienced as a form of empowerment and therefore attractive.

Article 4 ("The Role of Religion in Islamist Radicalisation Processes") analyzes interviews with five former radical Islamists and explores why they became religious and what characterized the processes of radicalization in the radical Islamist groups they became part of. The article finds that religion provided them with answers to emotions connected to doubt about existential questions, lack of a sense of belonging, experiences of troublesome family backgrounds, and discrimination. What attracted the "formers" to the radical Islamist groups and worldviews was that these gave them a new understanding of themselves and society and a sense of empowerment. The hatred, anger, and frustration that dominated the ideas, thoughts, and actions of the radical Islamist groups amplified and initiated the formers' radicalization.

Article 5 ("Talking about Radicalization") reflects on the inherent methodological problems of doing qualitative research on radicalization – a hard-to-reach group and a sensitive topic. The article shows how talking about radicalization with "professionals" working within prevention and other actors closely related to the issue of radicalization from a non-Muslim, white ethnic Danish researcher positionality often involved discussions about the concept of radicalization itself, sometimes at the expense of obtaining data on actual radicalization processes.

These summary chapters offer not only a more thorough theoretical and methodological understanding of the approaches taken in the research articles but also an elaboration of how radicalization processes understood as processes of subcultural formation and processes of development of religious emotions can be combined in an analytically fruitful manner that aids the understanding and theorization of the pull factors, or attraction, of radical Islamism in the West.

DANSK RESUME

Gennem teoretiske perspektiver, der kombinerer forskellige niveauer af forklaring på radikalisering, tilvejebringer denne afhandling en forståelse og teoretisering af, hvad der er tiltrækkende ved radikal islamisme i Vesten. Afhandlingen består af fem forskningsartikler, som bliver syntetiseret i disse sammenfattende kapitler.

Artikel 1 (Jihadism from a Subcultural Perspective) diskuterer relevansen af en subkulturel tilgang til studiet af jihadisme. Artiklen argumenterer for, at en del af det tiltrækkende ved jihadisme kan forstås ved at se jihadisme som en subkultur, der tilbyder et svar på problemer, der bunder i deltagernes delte sociale position. Artiklen argumenterer desuden for at relevansen af en subkulturel tilgang til jihadisme kan findes i dens evne til at analysere en af de centrale hybride kulturelle udtryksformer i jihadi subkultur, nemlig jihadi rap musik. Artiklen argumenterer for, at jihadi rap er en måde at udtrykke modstand gennem en kreativ kulturel bricolage af forskellige og ofte modstridende kulturelle stile, og at jihadi rap kan fortolkes som den eksplicitte manifestation af et bredere kollektivt, oppositionelt og subkulturelt svar på en delt situation bestående af oplevet andengørelse.

Artikel 2 (Rap, Islam, jihadi cool: A contribution to understanding the subcultural attractions of Western jihadi subculture) søger at forklare (en del af) det tiltrækkende ved jihadi subkultur ved at analysere det historiske forhold mellem hiphop og islam. Artiklen sporer anvendelsen af islam i hiphop til nylige udviklinger af jihadi rap. Inden for jihadi rap kan man observere en form for bricolage, der mixer og kombinerer hiphop musikalsk stil, US Black Islam symbolisme og jihadisme, og artiklen argumenterer for, at denne type af stilistisk appropriation af hiphop coolness er en del af, hvad der gør jihadi rap – og i en bredere forstand jihadi subkultur – æstetisk og stilistisk cool og derfor tiltrækkende.

Artikel 3 (Reinstating and contextualizing religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization in the West) søger at genindsætte religion i analysen af islamistisk radikalisering. Artiklen argumenterer for, at radikaliseringsforskningen er karakteriseret af et analytisk dødvande mellem modstridende positioner, der forklarer islamistisk radikalisering enten gennem primært strukturelle faktorer eller gennem primært specifikke fortolkninger af islam. Artiklen introducerer og udvikler et analytisk perspektiv, der muliggør en syntese mellem disse modstridende positioner, eftersom det tilbyder en måde at forstå, hvordan sociale og politiske kontekster kan være knyttet til religiøsitet. Perspektivet tilvejebringer en forståelse af, hvordan følelser som vrede mod samfundet kan transformeres til stærke religiøse følelser i radikale islamistiske grupper, som i nogle tilfælde kan igangsætte og forstærke religiøst baserede motivationer til at støtte eller udøve vold.

Artikel 4 (The Role of Religion in Islamist Radicalisation Processes) analyserer interviews med fem tidligere radikale islamister og undersøger, hvorfor de blev religiøse, og hvad der karakteriserede radikaliseringsprocessen i de radikale islamistiske grupper, de blev en del af. Artiklen konkluderer at religion tilbød dem svar på følelser forbundet til tvivl om eksistentielle spørgsmål, manglende følelse af tilhørsforhold, oplevelser fra problemfyldte familieforhold og diskrimination. Det, der tiltrak de tidligere radikale islamister til radikale grupper og deres verdenssyn var, at det gav dem en ny forståelse af sig selv og samfundet og en følelse af empowerment. Hadet, vreden og frustrationerne, der dominerede ideerne, tankerne og handlingerne i de radikale grupper, forstærkede og igangsatte de tidligere radikale islamisters radikalisering.

Artikel 5 (Talking about Radicalization) reflekterer over de iboende metodologiske problemer ved at foretage kvalitativ forskning om radikalisering – en svært tilgængelig gruppe og et sensitivt emne. Artiklen viser, hvordan det at tale med 'professionelle' som arbejder med forebyggelse af radikalisering og andre aktører tæt forbundet til radikalisering fra en ikke-muslimsk, hvid etnisk dansk forsker positionalitet ofte involverede diskussioner om radikaliseringsbegrebet, sommetider på bekostning af data om faktiske radikaliseringsprocesser.

Disse sammenfattende kapitler tilbyder en grundigere teoretisk og metodologisk forståelse af de tilgange, der anvendes i forskningsartiklerne, men også en elaborering af, hvordan radikaliseringsprocesser forstået som subkulturelle processer og processer, der fører til udvikling af religiøse følelser, kan kombineres på en analytisk frugtbar måde, der underbygger forståelsen og teoretiseringen af pull-faktorer, eller det tiltrækkende, forbundet med radikal islamisme i Vesten.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is part of a larger project on Islamist radicalization lead by Sune Qvotrup Jensen. Sune is the one that I first would like to thank. As my supervisor and as part of the larger project himself, he has had an invaluable impact on my journey towards completing the thesis – both on a personal and professional level. He has always been open for discussing ideas (even very bad ones). His comments and guidance on early article drafts have been illuminating. Thank you, Sune.

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ARTICLES AND THEIR PUBLICATION STATUS

In addition to these summary chapters, the dissertation consists of five research articles (hereon referred to as "Article no."). The following will present their status in the publication process.

Article 1: Larsen, J.F. & Jensen, S.Q. (2019). Jihadism from a subcultural perspective, *Critical Criminology,* 27(3): 421-436. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-019-09470-8

Article 2: Jensen, S.Q. & Larsen, J.F. Rap, Islam, jihadi cool: A contribution to understanding the subcultural attractions of Western jihadi subculture. Unpublished manuscript.

Article 3: Larsen, J.F. Reinstating and contextualizing religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization in the West. Resubmitted after major revisions.

Article 4: Larsen, J.F. The Role of Religion in Islamist Radicalisation Processes. Accepted to *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.

Article 5: Larsen, J.F. (2020). Talking about Radicalization, *Nordic Journal of Criminology,* 21(1): 49-66. DOI: 10.1080/2578983X.2019.1685805

Other relevant publications:

Jensen, S.Q. & Larsen, J.F. (2019). Sociological perspectives on Islamist radicalization – bridging the micro/macro gap, *European Journal of Criminology*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370819851356

Jensen, S.Q. & Larsen, J.F. (2018). "Er det terrorist, de vil have? Så skal jeg give dem en terrorist" - om skoleliv, andengørelseserfaringer og radikaliseringsprocesser ["Is it a Terrorist, They Want? Then I Will Give Them a Terrorist" – on School Life, Othering Experiences and Radicalization Processes], *Unge Pædagoger*, 3: 5-12.

Jensen, S.Q. & Larsen, J.F. (2017). Sociological perspectives on radicalization processes – some preliminary notes, *Working paper,* Aalborg University.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PLACING THE PHD DISSERTATION WITHIN THE BROADER PROJECT

This PhD dissertation is part of a larger project on Islamist radicalization processes lead by Associate Professor Sune Qvotrup Jensen and funded by Aalborg University's Talent Management Programme. The larger project sought to understand Islamist radicalization processes through the theoretical perspectives of subculture, gender and masculinity, and the sociology of religion. The following will describe how the different parts of the project have been distributed, and what the independent contribution of the PhD dissertation has been.

Gathering the empirical material

The empirical material, which this dissertation and the larger project draw on, has been collected by me, the author (see chapter four of these summary chapters).

- **The empirical material, A**

I have been responsible for identifying and contacting potential interviewees and for the continued contact with interviewees who have functioned as "attempted gatekeepers" who could refer me to other potential interviewees. I have also been responsible for conducting the interviews in person across Denmark and via video calls.

- **The empirical material, B**

Another empirical pillar, which I also have been responsible for, is virtual ethnographic-inspired internet research on jihadi rap. This material has been used in Articles 1 and 2, which analyze jihadi subculture.

- **The empirical material, C**

Another type of empirical material, which I have been responsible for finding, is biographical and journalistic sources. These have been used in some of the analyses but mostly as background material in the articles associated with this dissertation and the larger project.

Theoretical division of labor

- **A) Subculture and gender/masculinity**

Jensen has been the lead writer on theoretical discussions of subcultural and masculinity perspectives in the articles where these perspectives are applied (Articles 1 and 2). Within these articles, my contribution has been the analysis of the empirical examples. I have thus through subcultural and gender perspectives illustrated how jihadi subcultural styles, symbols, texts, and song lyrics can further our understanding of the attraction of radical Islamism in the West. These summary chapters, however, also include my independent discussion of the relevance of a subcultural approach to radicalization.

- **B) Sociology of religion**

The religious dimension of the larger project can be defined as my "subproject" within the larger project. I have been responsible for studying how religion has been discussed in the field of radicalization research and what role religion has been given in the understanding of radicalization. I have discussed and synthesized the different perspectives on the role of religion in Articles 3 and 4, which I independently authored. This also includes the introduction of a new sociological perspective that previously has been unutilized in the field of radicalization research. This perspective is the sociology of religious emotion (Riis & Woodhead 2010). I am therefore responsible for the theoretical contribution of sociology of religion and the discussion and analysis of how such a perspective can be useful in the understanding of Islamist radicalization processes. In these summary chapters, I furthermore discuss how the theoretical perspectives from subcultural theory and the sociology of religion are connected on an analytical level and complement each other, and how they contribute to the theorization of the attraction of radical Islamism.

Methodological reflections

I have been responsible for developing a reflective analysis of the methodological experiences of doing qualitative research on the political and highly contested concept of radicalization as a white, non-Muslim academic (Article 5). Chapter 4 of these summary chapters furthermore includes my reflections on interviewing former radical Islamists, doing virtual ethnographic-inspired internet research, and utilizing alternative empirical sources such as biographical material and journalistic sources.

The division of labor has led to an independent dissertation that is grounded in subcultural theory and the sociology of religion. Through these perspectives and the empirical material, the dissertation seeks to further the understanding of and theorize what *attracts* people from the West who identify as Muslims to radical Islamist worldviews.

The next sections will describe the dissertation's contribution to the research field of Islamist radicalization, present the overall research aim and question, and show how

the different questions and perspectives of the research articles are related to each other.

1.2. PLACING THE DISSERTATION IN THE RESEARCH FIELD – A FOCUS ON "ATTRACTION"

The term "radicalization" has taken center stage in both academia and policy-making. However, there is no universally accepted definition of the concept. Alex P. Schmid (2013) has called the concept of radicalization "fuzzy" and "problematic" since it has been applied and understood in many different ways. However, it seems that we are "stuck" with radicalization (Horgan 2011). It has become an "analytical paradigm" (Malthaner 2017) and a "master signifier" (Kundnani 2012). The concept of radicalization has its origin in policy-making. After the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, the approach to and understanding of terrorism shifted from viewing terrorists as an external threat embedded in an "evil ideology" rooted in Islam (Johnson 2002) that should be fought through war, to viewing terrorism as something that could and should be analyzed; the homegrown terrorists of the Madrid and London attacks necessitated an exploration of how a terrorist could be produced in democratic Western societies (Kundnani 2012; Coolsaet 2019). "Radicalization" became the preferred conceptualization of this process. With its implementation in policy-making, radicalization was brought into the academic discussion (Schmid 2013; Kundnani 2012; Silva 2018). Some positions within this discussion have, however, been highly critical of the way the concept of radicalization has been applied in both policy-making and academic research. The following sections will discuss some of this criticism and what the answers to this criticism have been in radicalization research, and in the end, argue why a focus on the "attraction" of radical Islamism, given specific social and societal circumstances, can provide a fruitful analytical perspective and a way forward.

A critique of methodological individualism in radicalization research

A main critique within the academic discussion has been that radicalization has been understood mainly as a microlevel process, and as a consequence, the political and social contexts have been disregarded. Proponents of this critique argue that the concept of radicalization came to academic research with pre-inscribed assumptions. As discussed in Article 5, Pierre Bourdieu argues that social scientists need to break free from prefabricated problem formulations stemming from official and political definitions of the phenomenon under investigation, as these are products and reflections of doxical perceptions of the world (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992/1996). In regard to the concept of radicalization, one of these pre-inscribed assumptions is that Islamic theology inspires terrorists' attacks and, thus, that individual psychological and theological factors predict who become terrorists (Kundnani 2012: 5). The critique has been that the concept of radicalization has rendered the entire Muslim community in the West to be suspected of radicalization and, in the end, of terrorism

(see, e.g., Kundnani 2012; Malthaner 2017; Crone 2016; Githens-Mazer & Lambert 2010). According to the critics, this stigmatization and its resultant ethnic profiling can be counterproductive and actually make some people more prone to radicalization (see, e.g., Cassam 2018: 189; Silva 2018: 47; Schmid 2013: 5; Sedgwick 2010: 491). By understanding radicalization as an individual psychological and theological process, governments and policy-makers, according to this viewpoint, exclude potentially politically awkward factors from the analysis of radicalization (see, e.g., Schmid 2013: 5; Kundnani 2012: 5; Cassam 2018; Silva 2018). One critique within the academic discussion has thus been that the process of radicalization has been understood as being driven by *individual push factors* or deficits.

I agree with this critique. This dissertation therefore attempts to break with the criticized methodological individualism of both the concept of radicalization and of the usage of this concept in theoretical conceptions of radicalization processes. This is done by insisting on an approach that has the interplay between micro and macro factors in the center of the analysis (see Jensen & Larsen 2019). The answer to the critique of individualism in this dissertation is then not an analysis solely relying on structural explanations of radicalization. Some researchers have, however, relied mainly on structural factors, such as economic and social marginalization, in their explanation of radicalization processes. In other words, they have focused on *structural push factors*. The following section will discuss why such a focus can be problematic.

A critique of structural marginalization explanations in radicalization research

An ongoing debate among researchers has been whether or not there is a link between terrorism and socioeconomic factors. Some have argued that jihadists mostly come from middle-class families and are well educated (see Sageman 2008). Others argued that most militant jihadists come from lower socioeconomic strata (see Bakker 2011; Hecker 2018; for an overview, see Borum 2011). Peter R. Neumann (2016: 89-90) observed that socioeconomic origin is dependent on which country the militants are from. According to Neumann, foreign fighters from Germany, Belgium, France, and Scandinavia mostly come from the lower socioeconomic strata of their society, and they only have a low-level education, while foreign fighters from the UK mostly have completed a higher education. Thomas Hegghammer (2016) similarly noted that we cannot assume that the dynamics of terrorism is the same all over the world. His point is that there is a link between poverty and terrorism in the European context (see also Cottee 2011: 738). The point is not that there necessarily is a causal link between economic deprivation and terrorism, but rather that economic deprivation predisposes for radicalization (Hegghammer 2016: 13).

Some scholars therefore argue that we should look towards structural factors when explaining root causes for Islamist radicalization.[1] Structural factors are, however, more than economy/poverty itself. Instead, they have often been understood as the collective outcomes of economic deprivation, lack of mobility, experiences with racism and othering, and so on – what, in short, might be called an *ethno-class experience* (see Article 3). Many scholars who point to structural factors, and not individual psychology, as root causes of radicalization often maintain that structural factors are mediated through identity and status frustration (see Neumann 2016: 90; Cottee 2011: 738). The point is often made that jihadism can function as an answer to these frustrations (Roy 2017; Cottee 2011; Hafez & Mullins 2015; Neumann 2016; Khosrokhavar 2017). The Salafist movement offers a way to rebel against Western society as it is as different as possible from the way of life in the West. Salafism also offers order as there are rules for most aspects of life, and it offers friendship and a social network (Neumann 2016: 112; Roy 2017; see also Article 3). Jihadism is thus understood as "an act of identity recovery" that is especially attractive for young people in the "ghetto" who on the one hand hate the society they live in and, on the other, feel that their situation is hopeless (Khosrokhavar 2017: 74-75; Roy 2017).

Structural explanations for radicalization place radicalization in the context of social and societal circumstances, which to some extent answers the criticism of the methodological individualism in radicalization research. Social conditions are taken seriously. However, even though structural explanations are necessary in order to understand who can find radical Islamism attractive, they are inadequate explanations. Many people experience structural strain, but they react to it in different ways. It is only a small minority that consider radical Islamism or jihadism as an answer. By focusing on the collective outcome of economic deprivation, lack of mobility, experiences with racism and othering, and so on, as the main driver of radicalization, structural perspectives end up arguing that radicalization is driven by *structural push factors*. It becomes an argument based on misery (or strain) pushing people into radical Islamism. Even though structural explanations are important in understanding *who* might be attracted to radical Islamist worldviews, they are less productive in explaining *what* might be attractive in these worldviews. Structural explanations leave little room for the (religious and political) meaning that radical Islamists themselves ascribe to their thoughts and actions. The argument seems to be that, even though radicals say that they travel to, for example, Syria for religious reasons, what in reality made them go were structural factors such as economic and social deprivation. This is problematic because religion is thus treated as an epi-phenomenon, and the role of religion is downplayed. As a result, by focusing on structural push-factors, this perspective does not say much about what people identifying as Muslims might find attractive about radical Islamism in its own (religious and political) right. Recognizing that structural factors are important, this dissertation seeks to provide an understanding of how structural social conditions can be related to individual

[1] The following section resembles arguments made in Article 3.

emotions, how these emotions can be constructed as religious emotions in a radical interpretation of Islam, and, through the empirical material, theorize what can be attractive in such a religious worldview (see Articles 3 and 4). The focus is thus on the interplay between structural and individual levels of explanation. Furthermore, by focusing on misery pushing people into radical Islamism, structural explanations are also inclined to overlook the more subcultural attraction of radical Islamism based on style and aesthetics. There is a need for more attention to what jihadi subcultures provide that is attractive. Some researchers on Islamist radicalization have described, for example, the attractiveness of jihadi coolness (Sageman, 2008), and some have taken a subcultural perspective on the phenomenon (Cottee 2011; Hemmingsen 2015; Pisoiu 2015b; Conti 2017; Andersen & Sandberg 2018; also see chapter 3 for an elaborate discussion of subcultural perspectives in radicalization research), but this dissertation argues that a subcultural perspective can contribute to more than what has hitherto been accomplished in terms of style and aesthetics, and add to the analytical focus on and theorization of the attraction of radical Islamism.

As a response to the focus on individual and structural push-factors, some scholars have suggested that we need to focus on what might *pull* some people towards radical Islamism. A focus on pull factors can therefore be seen as a stepping-stone towards this dissertation's focus on *attraction*.

Political pull factors

Some scholars have insisted that the roads leading to terrorism are first and foremost political processes, as extremist versions of religions always articulate a political ideology and because the main drivers of radicalization should be found in reactions to geopolitical circumstances, such as Western intervention in Muslim countries and Islamophobia in Western countries (Crone 2016; see also Schmid 2013: 9; Kundnani 2012: 20).[2] The reference to jihadists' idea of building a new Islamic state is often used as an argument to understand jihadists as political actors and to focus on pull factors. The argument is often made that jihadists are driven by political aspirations to change Western societies and create new societies and states elsewhere and should therefore be seen as rational political actors (Boserup 2016: 16; J. Sheikh 2016; Hemmingsen 2014). Manni Crone (2016: 596) thus argued that the prospect of a political utopia is one of the attractions of the Islamic State (ISIS). Therefore, what we need to understand is, according to Crone (2016: 587-588), that Islamist radicalization is not an individual process driven by religious ideology but instead by a "process of politicization."

By focusing on political pull factors and what might attract some people to radical Islamism, radicalization as a political process can be understood as a stepping-stone towards this dissertation's aim of understanding and theorizing the attraction of

[2] The following section resembles arguments made in Article 3.

radical Islamism. However, by emphasizing the political aspects of radicalization and terming it a process of politicization, the perspective neglects other *areas of attraction,* which radical Islamism has to offer. Just as structural marginalization explanations, political explanations also risk downplaying religious aspects and attractions of radicalization, for example, that the state-building project is specifically about building an *Islamic* state (see Article 3), and they risk overlooking attractions pertaining to style and aesthetics.

The focus on attraction - a third space in radicalization research

Instead of understanding Islamist radicalization as driven by individual or structural push factors, this dissertation offers a *third* space in radicalization research. It focusses on pull factors or, in other words, what *attracts* people who identify as Muslims to radical Islamism. Importantly, however, these pull factors can only be understood when we take into account both the microlevel and the macrolevel. The aim is therefore to *understand and theorize the attraction of radical Islamism given specific social and societal circumstances*. It is, however, still important to look at individual psychological or emotional factors, but in order to understand the formation of these individual emotions, we have to take into account the social and societal circumstances. Likewise, structural factors are still important in the understanding of the main drivers of radicalization, but these structural factors must be understood in connection to individual experiences in order to understand what can attract social actors and groups to radical Islamism. The aim of the articles that constitute this dissertation and these summary chapters is to further discuss and illuminate the interplay between micro-, meso-, and macrolevel explanations of radicalization in order to understand and theorize what *attracts* young people from the West to radical Islamism.

This is done through the analyses of processes of subcultural formation and processes of development of religious emotions. The subcultural perspective includes, but is not limited to, structural explanations of Islamist radicalization as it understands the attractiveness of subcultures as the answer they provide to shared situations of individuals (Jensen 2018a; Williams 2011. See chapter 3 of the summary chapters). However, the perspective adds the aesthetic and stylistic attraction of radical Islamism (see Articles 1 and 2). The focus on the development of religious emotions is important, not least because radical Islamists themselves most often give religious motivations for their thoughts and actions (see, e.g., Dawson & Amarasingam 2017). We consequently need to understand how religious emotions are constructed, and in order to do so, we need to take into account the social and societal situation of the individual. The perspectives thus accentuate the necessity of understanding the interplay among micro-, meso- and macrolevel explanations. This provides a way to understand and theorize radical Islamism as an attractive religious answer to the social and societal position of Muslims in the West (see Articles 3 and 4).

1.3. WHAT COUNTS AS RADICAL? A DEFINITION

Before presenting the overall research question and the research aims of the articles, this section will present the dissertation's definition of "radicalization." A strand of critique has asserted that the concept of radicalization is a source of confusion because it is employed in different contexts with different agendas (see Sedgwick 2010; Schmid 2013). One agenda is the security agenda (Sedgwick 2010), or the Anglo-Saxon approach (Neumann 2013), where the line between radical and moderate concerns whether there is a security threat to the state or individual persons. Another is the integration agenda (Sedgwick 2010), or the European approach (Neumann 2013), where radicalization is not just a security concern but also about ideological worldviews that do not comply with basic democratic values. These different agendas and approaches are at the forefront of the central debate within academic research about differentiating between cognitive and behavioral radicalization (for an overview see Neumann 2013; Malthaner 2017).

This dissertation lies closer to the integration agenda/European approach and agrees with scholars who insist that we, in order to understand why radicals act and think as they do, have to look at their belief system, but also at the secondary gains of radicalization (besides the manifest goal of changing society). These gains could be in terms of a sense of community, friendship, identity, and status (see Lindekilde & Olesen 2015: 143-144). Group-level mechanisms such as these are necessary to understand Islamist radicalization processes, and it would therefore be counterproductive to only focus on those that have committed a crime and isolate them from their milieu. This dissertation thus, importantly, understands Islamist radicalization processes as not only pertaining to perpetrators of violent extremism but also to a broader milieu that supports anti-democratic worldviews based on what is perceived by the individuals to be Islam. Accordingly, this dissertation defines Islamist radicalization as *processes that in democracies lead to anti-democratic values and/or the acceptance of violence as a legitimate means based on a frame of reference individuals or groups themselves define as Islamic*.

Within this dissertation, radicalization processes are analytically understood and discussed in a specific light that consists of processes of subcultural formation and development of religious emotions.

1.4. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

In view of the above, the research aim and questions of this dissertation all seek to move beyond methodological individualism and structural marginalization explanations, and, through the empirical material (see chapter 4), to advance the understanding of the *interplay* among different levels of explanation and offer a theorization of the attraction of radical Islamism.

The overall research question is the following:

How can we theorize the attraction of radical Islamism in the West?

Four of the five articles contribute to the answer of this question. Articles 1-4 analyze Islamist radicalization from subcultural and religious perspectives and thus, through the empirical material, contribute to understanding how we can theoretically grasp the attraction of radical Islamism in the West. Article 5 analyzes the methodological implications of doing qualitative research on radicalization (Article 5). The articles thus attempt to understand different but interrelated research questions or aims.

The research aim of Article 1 is to *discuss the relevance of a subcultural approach to the study of jihadism and to illustrate the relevance of this approach through an analysis of jihadi rap*. The purpose of the article is twofold. First, it discusses how a subcultural perspective combined with intersectionality can enable a grasp of the interplay between micro- and macrolevel factors and a grasp of the attraction by understanding jihadism as a collective response to a shared experience of marginalization and othering. Second, the article analyzes the attraction of jihadism through the content, style, and aesthetics of jihadi rap.

Article 2 expands on the first article's focus on the subcultural style and aesthetic creativity related to jihadi subculture through an analysis of the relationship among rap music, Islam, and jihadism. By applying a subcultural perspective, the article analyzes how Islam always has been part of hip-hop coolness and how that contributes to making Western jihadi subculture cool and attractive.

Articles 1 and 2 discuss how radical Islamism can be understood as an interplay between micro and macro processes by understanding radicalization as a subcultural response to a marginal and problematized position in society. Article 3 discusses how such a position can lead to a religious response. The article explores *the question of how we can reinstate religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization processes*, and it does so by introducing and developing the sociology of religious emotion (Riis & Woodhead 2010). The aim of the article is to provide an analytical perspective that can help in the understanding of how social and political conditions can produce emotions that can be socially constructed as religious emotions, and why that could be attractive, through religious emotional regimes such as those found in radical Islamist groups.

Article 4 applies the theoretical approach of the sociology of emotion (Riis & Woodhead 2010) to the interview material. The article draws on interviews with 23 different actors with first-hand knowledge of Islamist radicalization, and analyzes five in-depth interviews with former radicals. It seeks to understand two questions: *Why did they become religious?* and *What characterized the processes of radicalization in the radical Islamist groups they became part of?* The article analyses their religious

response to their experiences connected to personal family social background that left them cognitively open (Wiktorowicz 2005). Thereby it connects different levels of explanation of radicalization and provides an understanding of why radical Islamism was an attractive worldview for them.

Articles 1-4 all focus on why and how radical Islamism and radical Islamist groups can be attractive to young people in the West who identify as Muslim. The first four articles directly relate to the overall research question.

Article 5 analyzes interview experiences with current and former professionals working in the prevention of radicalization and other people closely connected to the issue. The aim of the article is to understand *What happens when one brings the concept of radicalization into the field?* and *What happens when the person who brings the concept of radicalization into the field is a non-urban, young ethnic majority male academic?* The article reflects on the inherent methodological problems of talking about radicalization from a non-Muslim, white ethnic Danish researcher positionality (Bourdieu 2005). This article thus reflects on some of the methodological issues connected to doing research on hard-to-reach groups and sensitive topics.

CHAPTER 2. EXISTING RESEARCH

This chapter will present and discuss existing research and current debates on Islamist radicalization that apply to the dissertation's focus on radicalization as processes of subcultural formation and processes of development of religious emotions. The chapter will first discuss the existing research that relates to understanding Islamist radicalization as subcultural formation or processes. Second, the chapter will review the existing research and current debates on the role of religion in Islamist radicalization processes as it is related to the dissertation's focus on religious emotions' link to radicalization.

2.1. EXISTING RESEARCH ON ISLAMIST RADICALIZATION AS SUBCULTURAL FORMATION

It is not unusual to find the concept of "subculture" used in research on Islamist radicalization. Farhad Khosrokhavar (2009) noted that jihadism is a "subculture of violence" within the larger Islamic culture and that this subculture has "mutated" into a "subculture of death." Crone (2015) argued that Islamist extremist milieus could be understood as "political subcultures." Marc Sageman (2011) similarly asserted that terrorism emerges out of a "political subculture," but also conceptualized a "subculture of extremism" and a "neo-jihadi subculture." Anita Peresin and Alberto Cervone (2015) described a portrayal of a "jihadi girl power subculture" in ISIS propaganda. And, Hegghammer (2017b: 1) described radical Islamists as a "subculture" when he focused on the cultural practices within jihadist groups. Research on the cultural, stylistic, and aesthetic aspects of radical Islamism and jihadism often describe radical Islamist groups as subcultures, using adjectives such as "pop-jihad" (Dantschke 2012), "jihadi cool" (Sageman 2008), or "jihad chic" (Picart 2015). I will return to the value of these perspectives in regard to this dissertation, but the point here is that, even though the concept of "subculture" is often used, it is only rarely informed by the knowledge of subcultural theory and central debates within this field. As is the case with the examples mentioned above, "subculture" is instead used as a descriptive or neutral concept, perhaps even merely a term, to describe radical Islamists as (very) different from and in opposition to other more mainstream interpretations of Islam and/or Western democratic societies. The present dissertation argues that there is more to gain when/if we use "subculture" as an analytical concept and employ actual subcultural theory in our understanding of Islamist radicalization processes. This does, however, not mean that subcultural theory is entirely absent from the research field.

Subcultural theory in research on Islamist radicalization

Perspectives on Islamist radicalization that draw on subcultural theory in their understanding of the phenomenon differ in their argument as to why and how such an analytical approach can be fruitful. This differentiation is mainly based on the various different understandings of the social background of those who are attracted by radical Islamist worldviews.

In their work on making sense of the January 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, Sandra Walklate and Gabe Mythen (2016) argued that a subcultural approach could be useful in the understanding of the values of the perpetrators of the attacks. The perpetrators all came from deprived residential areas and Walklate and Mythen (2016: 338) asserted that, in order to understand the subcultural processes, we must take into account the structural context. An example of such a subcultural approach to understanding Islamist radicalization is Simon Cottee's (2011) analysis of jihadism as a subcultural response to social strain. Cottee's (2011: 731-733) aim was to understand why Muslim youths from secular Western societies and often with lower-class backgrounds and not "religiously pious" were attracted to al-Qaeda inspired groups. In order to answer this question, Cottee turned to the classic subcultural theory of Albert K. Cohen (1955) and his analysis of the formation of delinquent juvenile gangs. According to A.K. Cohen, lower-class juvenile males are often status frustrated because they cannot live up to the criteria for success in the education system. Reacting to being defined as failures in school, they form delinquent gangs that have different values and measurements for success opposed to the norms of those who view them as failures. The gang can thus be understood as a collective solution to a structurally imposed problem (A.K. Cohen 1955; Cottee 2011: 737). According to Cottee, contemporary jihadism can be understood as a way to resolve young Muslims' "twin problems of status-frustration and identity-confusion" (Cottee 2011: 738). Jihadism is opposed to Western democratic values such as gender and religious equality and values commitment to a specific interpretation of Islam over the material criteria for success. Jihadism also offers a cohesive identity as there are rules on most aspects of life and an opportunity to become a holy warrior (Cottee 2011: 738-739). We can then, according to Cottee, understand why jihadism can be attractive for Muslims in the West as it is a collective answer to a shared problem induced by social strain.

The focus on social strain has, however, met some criticism among other scholars on Islamist radicalization employing subcultural perspectives. Daniela Pisoiu suggested that jihadists do not react to structural constraints as they come from different social backgrounds. Instead, jihadists are driven by a "need to resist Western norms and values" (Ahmed & Pisoiu 2017: 162). For her, the status involved in being a jihadist does not have much to do with a reaction to status frustration but rather as a way to gain *status as such*, as someone who has done something that is deemed "cool" or "dangerous" (Pisoiu 2015b: 16, 22). She thus rejects subcultural theories such as A.K.

Cohen's and Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin's (1960) illegitimate opportunity structure that describes how structural strain prevents working-class people from achieving middle-class status (Pisoiu 2015b). According to Pisoiu, what is needed is a subcultural perspective on jihadism that focusses on the importance and meaning of aesthetics, style, lifestyle, experience, and self-performance among jihadists. She thus employs subcultural perspectives from the Birmingham School (CCCS) focused on style, such as that of Dick Hebdige (1979) (Ahmed & Pisoiu 2017: 166; Pisoiu 2015a: 167; Pisoiu 2015b). In her analysis of known jihadists, she found support for subcultural concepts, such as bricolage, homology, and resistance (Pisoiu 2015b). Cottee (2011: 743) argued for the need of more research on the "cultural architecture" of jihadism and what he calls "jihadi subcultural style." In this regard, Pisoiu and Cottee seem to agree. Pisoiu has also discussed how known jihadists have mixed Western hip-hop and street culture styles with traditional Islamic clothing and symbols in processes of bricolage as ways of expressing resistance (Pisoiu 2015a: 170; Pisoiu 2015b). This opportunity of self-performance and extreme levels of protest can hence be said to be what Pisoiu has described as attractive for young Muslims in the West in becoming jihadists. In this regard, Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2011, 2015) concurred with Pisoiu. Like Pisoiu, Hemmingsen (2015) criticized Cottee (2011) for being too structurally deterministic. She applied Theodore Roszak's (1995) concept of "counterculture" to jihadism (see also Lentini 2013) (Hemmingsen 2015: 8). Like Pisoiu, Hemmingsen turned to the analysis of the mixing of different styles and symbols in the jihadism counterculture as part of what would be attractive for Muslims in the West. First, she argued that the jihadism counterculture is the most high-profiled, and thus the most dangerous and cool. Second, she noted that the counterculture has a high potential of offering action and adventure, and third, that jihadism is a convenient choice as the public and political debate often labels Islam and Muslims as extremists (Hemmingsen 2015: 12). None of these reasons for the attraction of the jihadism counterculture included structural factors. Hemmingsen and Pisoiu can therefore be said to represent an employment of subcultural perspectives to the understanding of Islamist radicalization that sees young Muslims in the West as connected in their opposition to and resistance against Western societies rather than social background, as well analyzing this opposition and resistance through subcultural concepts such as style and bricolage.

Other researchers that have taken a subcultural perspective on Islamist radicalization have contributed to research in the subcultural style and countercultural elements of jihadism. Some researchers have focused on the subcultural elements of propaganda material from terrorist organizations. Uliano Conti (2017) analyzed jihadist propaganda from Deso Dogg, a rapper who joined ISIS and became a prominent propagandist, through subcultural perspectives such as bricolage (Hebdige 1979). According to Conti, this form of propaganda and the bricolage between rap culture and jihadist culture makes jihadism understandable and identifiable for European youths (Conti 2017: 9). Jan C. Andersen and Sveinung Sandberg (2018) also focused on ISIS propaganda through a subcultural perspective by analyzing provocation

through extreme violence in the now defunct magazine *Dabiq*. A.K. Cohen (1955) described how individuals in deviant groups receive pleasure in the dismay of other people towards the actions of the deviant group. Andersen and Sandberg (2018: 13) employed this perspective to describe how the extreme violence portrayed in *Dabiq* is meaningful in a subcultural framework because subcultures "embrace and cultivate otherness" in their quest for detachment from the mainstream. The provocative display of extreme violence in *Dabiq* subsequently appeals to *some* in the jihadist subculture in the West. In line with this attraction to otherness, some researchers have asserted that a subcultural element of jihadism is exactly this pleasure of promoting and committing violence. Cottee and Keith Hayward (2011: 966) argued that terrorists are *violent* agents who are attracted by the extreme violence, and Pisoiu (2015a: 170) emphasized that a subcultural dimension not to be overlooked is the pleasure of violence and how it attracts those who enjoy committing it (see also Crone 2014). In a recent publication, Cottee (2019) furthermore employed David Matza and Gresham M. Sykes's (1961) theorization of deviance as not at war with but broadly committed to the dominant value system, and pointed out that the violence and machismo of the jihadi subculture, as shown, for example, in ISIS propaganda, has parallels to the taste for violence in the dominant culture exemplified through the demand for more violent video games and mixed martial arts cage fighting (Cottee 2019: 12). Cottee (2019: 14) thus argued that the attraction of jihadism is less mysterious than we might think. Terrorist communication and propaganda have thus been analyzed using subcultural perspectives that help grasp the mixing of styles and subcultural provocations and how these elements can appeal to young Muslims in the West.

The reception of terrorist propaganda has, however, also been the subject of subcultural analysis. Although not drawing on traditional subcultural theory, Crone (2014) suggested that Islamist radicalization processes should (also) be understood as embodied and mimetic practices. According to her, young men from the West "pick up specific ways of speaking, walking, dressing etc." from such media as YouTube videos with jihadists from ISIS that give them a specific appearance and demeanor that materializes their position of being part of a "militant subculture" (Crone 2014: 299). In his study of the "subculture of internet jihadism," Gilbert Ramsay (2011) similarly examined jihadism as media consumption by "ordinary jihadists" who likely will never engage in violence and the associated online subcultures. He drew on theories of fandom that are grounded in subcultural perspectives mainly from the CCCS, such as Hebdige (1979), and found that there is an idolization of prominent radical Islamist ideologues and that the lives and worldviews of the "internet jihadists" are affected by this fandom.

The aim of the present dissertation is to better understand and theorize the attraction of radical Islamism given its specific social and societal circumstances. In this application of actual subcultural theory (and as a consequence thereof), the dissertation exceeds the division in the subcultural approach to Islamist radicalization between understanding the attraction as either based on structural strain or on an

aesthetic fascination. All the abovementioned subcultural approaches to radical Islamism can be said to focus in different ways on the attraction of jihadism. Cottee sought to explain this attraction as an answer to structural imposed strain. However, Pisoiu attempted to explain this attraction through style and self-presentation, while Hemmingsen did so through style and being part of a counterculture, and Andersen and Sandberg, as well as Cottee and Hayward, did this through the attraction of extreme violence and provocation. Yet, there seems to be a division between Cottee's "structural" position and Pisoiu's (and others) "stylistic" position. I, on the other hand, position myself in the middle of this division and suggest that these positions must be thought of together. In other words, concepts such as style and bricolage are central to a subcultural understanding of Islamist radicalization – on this, I completely agree with the authors promoting this application of subculture to the phenomenon – but, importantly, we have to take into account the social and societal circumstances of participants in the subculture in order to understand the meaning of the subcultural style. This means that subcultural perspectives on the social strain these participants experience are equally important. For example, if we are to understand the self-realization that jihadists gain from going to Syria, then we must understand this in the context of the individual's social and societal position. That is, the stylistic aspects of jihadi subculture are expressions of a specific societal position.

The present dissertation also differs from most of the subcultural approaches to Islamist radicalization as it includes the broader supportive milieus in its analysis. It is exactly this supportive milieu that can be theorized as a subculture (see Articles 1 and 2). Most research that employs subcultural theory to the understanding of contemporary radical Islamism has focused on jihadists/terrorists themselves and their stylistic repertoire and propaganda. I suggest that, by including the broader supportive milieu (or what Ramsay (2011) calls "ordinary jihadists" and Cottee (2019) calls "non-violent supporters and sympathizers"), we can better understand and theorize the social ecology of terrorism and what in the first place can attract people from specific social and societal circumstances to jihadism. Without employing subcultural theory, some researchers have described such an attraction through terms such as "jihadi cool" (Sageman 2008) and "pop-jihad" (Dantschke 2012), thus emphasizing the stylistic appeal of the jihadi subculture. The following sections will discuss this research and how it relates to the subcultural focus of this dissertation on the connection between rap, Islam, and Islamism (see Articles 1 and 2).

Jihadi coolness and the aesthetic pull factors

It was Sageman (2008) who coined the term "jihadi cool" in his description of the appeal of global Islamist terrorist groups. The economically and socially marginalized young Muslims of the "Third Wave" of jihadism, according to Sageman (2008: 158), have a desire to make something of themselves. Sageman thus argued along the same line as e.g. Pisoiu, however, he grounded this desire in their social and societal position. According to Sageman (2008: 158-159), the lack of positive local role

models for young Muslims in deprived residential areas, especially in Europe, have caused these young people to look up to terrorists who are perceived as fighting for the cause of Muslims. Sageman (2008: 160) then uses the concept of "jihadi cool" to describe how it has become "fashionable to emulate terrorists" both in the way they talk, what he describes as "jihadi talk," but also in their actions, as joining Islamist terrorist groups is perceived as something cool.

Since Sageman coined the term, several researchers on Islamist radicalization have used it or similar terms to describe how Islamist terrorist groups or organizations have tried to appeal to young Muslims in the West. Taking her point of departure in the jihadist milieus in Germany, Claudia Dantschke (2012) used the term "Pop-Jihad" to describe contemporary jihadists. According to her, and resembling the idea of Sageman, these jihadists see jihad as a lifestyle of "looking and sounding cool" (Dantschke 2012: 13-15). She, however, also noted that the Pop-Jihad movement is especially proficient in utilizing social media but also in producing what she called "Rap style Nasheeds[3]" in order to "directly access their main target group of adolescents" (Dantschke 2012: 13-14). Caroline J.S. Picart (2015) shares Dantschke's understanding of jihadi cool as an "instrument" as she argued that the imagined status as jihadi cool (or "jihadi chic," a term she also used) is an important part of Islamist terrorist organizations' recruitment strategy. Picart also described how terrorist organizations create an image of jihadi cool through American vernacular and "MTV aesthetic" in their online magazines and merchandise (Picart 2015: 364). Similarly, Laura Huey (2015) investigated how "pro-jihadist ideologues" use political jamming, or memes, to make Islamist terrorism fun, exciting, or, in other words, jihadi cool as it appeals to young people who are already part of such an internet culture (Huey 2015: 2).

Even though researchers have not explicitly employed subcultural theory, they have explored the "jihadi cool" aspects of Islamist radicalization processes that include the stylistic and aesthetic dimensions of the phenomenon and discussed the mixing of Western street cultural style and jihadist or traditional Islamist style as part of what makes radical Islamism attractive to young Muslims in the West. However, their focus has been mainly instrumental as they have argued that jihadi cool is something that terrorist organizations use to appeal to young Westerners in their propaganda. The focus on propaganda is, of course, an important contribution to the research field, as terrorist organizations no doubt can be professional in their tactics of recruitment. However, the argument of the present dissertation is that the mixing of Western street cultural style and jihadist or traditional Islamist style is not only instrumental. Through the case of rap, this dissertation theorizes the attraction of radical Islamism as it discusses how Islam has always been part of hip-hop coolness and a way to show resistance against social and societal structures, and suggests that jihadi rap needs to

[3] Nasheeds or anashid (plural form of the word nashid) is a form of Islamic chant (see Lahoud 2017).

be understood in this light and not just as instrumental propaganda for recruitment (see Articles 1 and 2). The following section will discuss existing research on Islam and rap.

The rap, Islam, Islamism connection

Since the birth of the genre of hip-hop in the Bronx in the 1970s, it has addressed what has been perceived as injustices in the lives of minorities. In the 1980s and 1990s, what has often been referred to as the "golden age of hip-hop" (Khabeer 2016, 2007; Alim 2006), the critique of social injustice among black minorities in the US was often expressed in an Islamic vernacular in hip-hop. Many rappers in this era adhered to different versions of what has been called Black Islam (see Swedenburg 1997). To mainstream Sunni and Shia Muslims, the Black Islam versions of Islam can seem so unorthodox that they are categorized as un-Islamic (Khabeer 2016: 48; Swedenburg 1997: 2). Black Islam is directed at the "systemic inequality" of Black communities, and it is an attempt to deliver an alternative and empowering understanding for Black individuals and communities of themselves (Khabeer 2016: 49; Rose 1994; Cheney 1999; Knight 2016; Quinn 1996; McLaren 1999; Alim 2006; Aidi 2004). Examples are the Five Percenters, who understand the black man to have god potential (Swedenburg 1997; Knight 2016), and the Nation of Islam who believe that Black people can "regain their rightful position among humankind" through "knowledge of self," in other words, through insight and a reinterpretation of Black peoples' position in society (Khabeer 2016: 61). Samy Alim (2006: 46) has described Black Islam inspired hip-hop as "Muslim verbal jihad" and the rappers as "verbal mujahidin," Suad A. Khabeer (2007) has described it as "Islamic hip-hop" and moreover as "conscious hip-hop," and Felicia Miyakawa (2005) has described it as "God Hop."

However, it has not only been in the US that Islam has been part of hip-hop. Hisham Aidi (2004: 116) has described hip-hop as "*the* idiom for minority youth and urban activism in Europe" (see also Aidi 2014). An example is, according to Aidi (2004, 2014), young political Muslim rappers in France whose songs often revolve around critiques of the life circumstances of socioeconomic marginalized Muslims in France, but also is often critical of the relationship between Islam and the West. Thomas Solomon (2006) analyzed German Turkish rap groups and found that they similarly rapped about experiences of racism but also promoted the unity of a "shared Muslim identity" and a way to revalorize Muslim identity. Kamaludeen M. Nasir (2016) found similar elements in Muslim hip-hop in Sydney, which he found always has had a "migrant element to it" that has criticized experiences of, for example, unemployment and racism (Nasir 2016: 81). There are thus several parallels between the critical vernacular of US Black Islam in US hip-hop and the critique of immigrants' social and societal position included in Sunni Islamic hip-hop in other parts of the Western world.

The tradition of resistance and social critique in Muslim hip-hop from the "golden age" in the US to Muslim hip-hop in other parts of the world has links to the recent development of jihadi rap. What characterizes jihadi rap, and distinguishes it from other forms of Muslim rap, is that the critique of the geopolitical role of the West and of the life circumstances of Muslims living in the West takes a jihadist turn. It calls for a violent jihad against disbelievers (see Articles 1 and 2). According to Aidi (2014: 207), European officials are scrutinizing hip-hop milieus in larger cities' immigrant areas in order to decide which artists to "legitimize and which to push aside." There is a concern about hip-hop artists whose songs have been described as "Muslim hate rap" as it can contribute to making jihad something cool (Aidi 2014: 206. See also Swedenburg 2009). Aidi (2014: 205) has linked this form of rap to "jihadi cool." Such jihadi rappers include those that are discussed in Articles 1 and 2. The important point of this dissertation is, however, that this does not mean that jihadi rap (or jihadi cool) is always part of an instrumental propaganda machine orchestrated by terrorist organizations. The coolness of jihad needs to be understood in connection with how Islam has always been part of hip-hop coolness and a way to show resistance against social, societal, and global structures (see Article 2). Recent research on Islamist radicalization has concentrated on the movement of people from criminal street gangs to jihadist milieus. This has been termed the "crime-terror nexus" (Ilan & Sandberg 2019; Basra & Neumann 2016, 2017; Hutchinson & O'malley 2007; Ibáñez 2013), "the crime-terror continuum" (Makarenko 2004), and "cross-over" (Christensen & Mørck 2017; Wilson & Sullivan 2007). In an instrumental understanding of jihadi cool and jihadi rap, we *can* understand this movement of people as a result of successful propaganda strategies. However, the argument of this dissertation is that, through a subcultural perspective, we can further understand this phenomenon in a less instrumental fashion that also includes the possibility that jihadi subculture and Black oppositional street culture (including rap and hip-hop) have emerged from similar frustrations. They share the same source, provide answers to the same shared situations, and are both oppositional. Therefore, it is quite logical that they would converge (Article 1). This dissertation theorizes jihadi coolness and, herein, jihadi rap as examples of *one* aspect of the possible attraction of radical Islamism for young marginalized Muslims in the West. A subcultural perspective can in this way help shed light on the social ecology of radical Islamist milieus. Radicalization as processes of subcultural formation has been explored in Articles 1 and 2.

2.2. EXISTING RESEARCH ON THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN ISLAMIST RADICALIZATION PROCESSES

The following sections will discuss existing debates within radicalization research over the role of religion. Cottee (2017: 443) separated different existing arguments on the role of religion (or the lack thereof) into two categories: "materialists," who argue that jihadism is driven by structural factors and "idealists," who argue that there is a direct link between Islamist ideology and violent action. Marranci (2006: 2-4) made a similar categorization and asserted that proponents of the argument that structural

factors explain Islamist radicalization would call the proponents of Islamist radicalization as driven by radical Islamist ideology "neo-Orientalists," and that these neo-Orientalists vice versa would call the other side "Apologists." The role of religion has indeed been one of the most debated themes in the research on Islamist radicalization, at least since the attacks in the US on September 11, 2001.

The critique of the "religious terrorism" notion

According to some scholars, it is widely assumed by policy-makers and the general public that an extremist version of Islam is the cause of contemporary terrorist attacks (see, e.g., Mills & Miller 2017; Dalgaard-Nielsen & Lund 2019; Kundnani 2012) and that this assumption is also present in research on terrorism. In his research on what he called "the myth of religious violence," (Cavanaugh 2009) William T. Cavanaugh noted that, in order to say that religion is more prone to lead to violence than secular matters, there must be a sharp dividing line between the religious and the secular. . He, however, argued that this line is often crossed by scholars whom he labelled as "religion-and-violence theorists" (among others, he named Hitchens 2007; Rapoport 1991; Juergensmeyer 1993, 2008; Wentz 1993; S. Harris 2004) (Cavanaugh 2017: 26) who include secular matters such as nationalism as a form of religion in order to "fit" their argument for the connection between religion and violence. According to Cavanaugh (2017, 2009), there are no empirical facts for claiming that religion is more prone to promote violence than secular matters (see also Francis 2016) and that reducing the cause of Muslim anger towards the West to their religion conveniently covers up Western aggression in Muslim countries (Cavanaugh 2017: 30; see also Mills & Miller 2017; Hafez 2003; Crone 2016; Boserup 2016; Lindekilde & Olesen 2015). Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson (2011) similarly suggested that violence is violence and that deeming it secular or religious makes little sense, as the two, according to them, cannot be separated. Furthermore, they pointed out that, by labelling groups on the basis of religious beliefs, the assumption is that it is beliefs that cause a certain behavior rather than, for example, past behavior or organization dynamics, which they believed to be a more correct understanding of motivations for behavior (Gunning & Jackson 2011: 381). In his analysis of the violence of al-Qaeda and ISIS, Pieter Nanninga (2017a, 2017b) argued that asking about the role of religion would not facilitate the analysis because "historical, political, social, cultural, and religious" aspects of their violence cannot be separated (Naninnga 2017b: 184). Instead, he insisted what we should focus on why this form of violence has been framed as religious and that an answer to this question could be that terrorist groups benefit from the powerful message of framing their violence as religious (Nanninga 2017b: 185; see also Badey 2002).

In addition to this overall critique of connecting religion and violence, more specific reasons or arguments for why religion is not a main driving factor in Islamist radicalization can be identified in research on Islamist radicalization.

Three arguments for why Islam is not a main driving factor in Islamist radicalization[4]

The following will focus mainly on Olivier Roy's research as it illustrates some of the main arguments for why religion or Islam should not be seen as a main driving factor and because Roy has been engaged in a fierce debate with Gilles Kepel, whose arguments for why religion *does* play a significant role will be presented later. At least three arguments for why Islam is not a main driving factor behind the radicalization of contemporary jihadists can be identified in Roy's research and in the general debate.

One argument is that those who become radical Islamists only have *low levels of religious knowledge* and, thus, that their acts and thoughts cannot be deemed religious. Roy (2017) studied Islamist radicalization in France with a special focus on the "banlieues," which are areas often defined by a large ethnic minority population and economic deprivation – and areas wherefrom many foreign fighters and domestic terrorists have emerged. His point is that the young Muslims from these areas are largely ignorant about Islam (see also Khosrokhavar 2017). This is, he noted, however not just the case with young Muslims in France. Referring to leaked documents of ISIS sign-in sheets, he stated that over 70% of the Western recruits to ISIS have only a basic knowledge about Islam (Roy 2017: 42; see also Dalgaard-Nielsen and Lund 2019: 115). The underlying notion seems to be "that 'truly' religiously motivated actions can only be undertaken by people who have a high level of knowledge about theology" (Article 4). To underline this point, Roy furthermore stressed that we need to focus on *when* jihadists embrace religion and that this happens not long before they go into action (Roy 2017: 31). This is, for him, more evidence that their motivation is not religion or Islam. Others have also argued that contemporary radical Islamists are characterized by a lack of grounding in traditional mainstream Islam and that knowledge about Islam and a grounding in a "moderate" interpretation of the religion can function as a bulwark against radicalization (Aly & Striegher 2012: 869; Akers 2010; Githens-Mazer & Lambert 2010; Patel 2011; Adamczyk, Freilich & Kim 2017).

A second argument is that *religion is used instrumentally.* It is often claimed that "central persons, leaders or radicalizers use Islamic texts, verses from the Quran and holy traditions to mobilize and recruit actors for a political struggle" (Article 3) (see Hafez & Mullins 2015; Badey 2002). Furthermore, according to Roy (2017: 67), turning towards religion and utilizing some of the Islamist vocabulary and symbols can be a way for young identity confused and angry Muslims from the banlieues to show resistance towards a secular French society that has expelled Islam and religion in general from the public space. The argument is that, when "radicalizers" use Islamic

[4] The following resembles arguments in Articles 3 and 4.

texts to recruit the next generation of fighters, it resonates with young people in the West who are looking for a way to revolt against society.

A third argument is that "*religion is used merely as justification* of militant engagement and other violent behaviour (see for example, Crone 2010, 2014)" (Article 3). Roy's point is that the young radicals use bits and pieces from verses from the Quran and hadiths to build their own imagery and to "throw in people's faces" (Roy 2017: 43). What motivates them, according to Roy, is not Islam or religion as such. Instead, it is radicalism itself, which they then fit into a jihadist paradigm. He sees contemporary jihadists as representatives of a generation of nihilists (Roy 2017: 53) that go to Syria to become martyrs and thereby make up for their sinful lives. Islam thus becomes merely a justification for engaging in violence and militant acts.

Arguments such as these three for why religion or Islam is not a main driving factor behind Islamist radicalization, and the arguments against the connection between religion and violence covered in the previous section, have, however, been met with criticism among scholars who believe that we must take the religious aspect of Islamist radicalization and terrorism seriously. As discussed in Articles 3 and 4, this dissertation lies closer to the following views on the role of religion in Islamist radicalization processes. Taking the religious aspects of Islamist radicalization seriously is necessary in order to understand and theorize how specific interpretations of Islam are part of the attraction of radical Islamism.

The critique of the "downplaying" of religion

Assessing the research on Islamist radicalization and terrorism, Cottee (2014) has criticized what he has called a "systematic neglect of theistic violence" and Lorne L. Dawson (2017, 2018) has criticized the "inclination to minimize the religious pronouncements" of jihadists. This "systematic neglect" of the role of religion can, according Cottee (2014), Dawson (2017, 2018), Graeme Wood (2015), and Amarnath Amarasingam (2018), be attributed to a range of "interpretative prejudices" (Dawson 2017: 33) or "biases" in the research field.

One such bias has been termed *the secular bias*. Dawson (2018: 144) has argued that the secular bias can be seen among scholars on terrorism that understand processes of radicalization as solely to do with political grievances, and among scholars who reject the role of ideology overall in the radicalization process and, thus, also reject religious motivations as significant. Cottee (2014: 983) has criticized criminological research for understanding the criminal subject as essentially a secular subject (see also Amarasingam 2018). Although calling it a "Western bias," Wood (2015) has similarly criticized what he perceives as an underlying assumption that, if religion does not matter much in a Western context, then it must also be irrelevant in other contexts such as Raqqa or Mosul. Another bias has been termed *the religious bias*. Dawson (2018: 143) asserted that the religious bias can be found in arguments that

acknowledge that all religions have a violent history, but "allow religion *per se* to slip the noose of condemnation" because they identify religion as something essentially good or having a "moral virtuosity." Similarly, Cottee (2014: 984) claimed that criminological research on theistic violence has been characterized by a "pro-religious perspective" that has focused mainly on the crime-reducing effects of religion and almost never on the crime-producing effects. A third bias has been termed *the liberal bias*. Cottee (2014: 985-986) used the term to describe the reluctance to address Islamist theistic violence as caused by a fear of demonizing a religion that is already heavily criticized by the public and by right-wing politicians (see also Dawson 2018: 142). Wood (2017: 20-21) argued that this fear, to some extent, has caused some scholars to be reluctant to speak about "unpleasant" parts of Islamic history, such as slavery, which, for example, ISIS has used as legitimization for their adoption of slavery.

The critics of the various biases in the research on Islamist radicalization have pointed out that this "discomfort" in addressing the religious aspects of radical Islamist violence and radicalization is "a major obstacle in the analysis of movements which see religion as the overall framework for interpreting and justifying their actions" (Hoffman 2017). In all circumstances, as I have emphasized in Articles 3 and 4, biases such as these cause religion to be understood as a secondary explaining factor or an epi-phenomenon. The present dissertation therefore places itself in line with the critique of the downplaying of religion and aims at reinstating religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization processes in order to understand and theorize the attraction of radical interpretations of Islam (see Articles 3 and 4). The following will thus focus on research that has argued that religion is an important explanatory factor in Islamist radicalization processes.

Arguments for why radical Islamism is (also) a religious phenomenon

As stated above, Roy has been in a fierce debate with Kepel over what role to assign religion in processes of radicalization. Like Roy, Kepel has also taken the French banlieues for his point of departure. But, unlike Roy, Kepel has argued that there has been a widespread Islamization of young Muslim from these areas (Kepel 2017: 197). The riots in France in 2005 where young Muslims took control over streets in some urban areas was, for Kepel, the pivotal year that laid the groundwork for the process of religious radicalization, culminating in the attacks on Charlie Hebdo. He asserted that this confrontational attitude towards French society fit well into the line of thought of Islamist movements, such as Salafism, which saw French society and the Western way of life as un-Islamic (Kepel 2017: 37-38). Kepel argued that these Islamist movements have contributed to "the establishment of a milieu favorable to ISIS" (Kepel 2017: 118), and he called the few that have committed criminal acts "the avant-garde of a larger Salafist trend" (Kepel 2017:66). This implies that Islam is not just a convenient identity marker used to rebel against society but that the period from 2005-2015 can be characterized as an actual religious radicalization of some young

Muslims in France. Kepel has therefore placed more importance on the role of radical Islamist interpretations of Islam than Roy. The present dissertation agrees that radical Islamist interpretations of Islam must be taken seriously. It, however, also argues, as in Article 3, that "we can derive both a quantitative and a qualitative understanding of the role of religion from Kepel. He argues that a large number of young Muslims in the suburbs have been Islamized. Whether this quantitative argument is true and whether this is also the case in other Western countries is debatable. However, we do not have to accept the quantitative argument in order to accept his qualitative argument, which is that Islamist radicalization is (also) a religious phenomenon – those who are radical Islamists are religious" (Article 3).

This argument can also be found among researchers who have explored and discussed the religious grounding of radical Islamism. Mehdi Mozzafari (2007) has claimed that Islamism, which he defines as "a religious ideology with a holistic interpretation of Islam whose final aim is the conquest of the world by all means" (Mozzafari 2007: 21), has its grounding in the Quran. According to him, Islamists see the reestablishment of a caliphate as the only solution to the existing world order and that to reach this goal, violence and terror attacks are legitimate means (Mozzafari 2007: 23-24). Mark Juergensmeyer (2003) similarly insisted that Islam has a history that has legitimized violence and that it contains theological concepts of a "cosmic war" between Muslims and non-believers. Similarly, in his study of the evolution of the ideas behind Islamist radicalism, Shiraz Maher (2016) argued that the brutal violence committed by radical Islamist terrorist groups is not irrational. According to him, all acts by these groups and individuals are grounded in a Salafi-jihadist reading of scripture (Maher 2016: 20), which, according to him, "can be considered Islam's latest – and perhaps most successful – political religion" (Maher 2016: 27).

In terms of the sharp division between religious and secular matters promoted by critics of the connection between violence and religion, for whom even the establishment of a caliphate should not be categorized as religious (Gunning & Jackson 2011: 376-377), these scholars on the religious grounding of radical Islamism claim that there are political dimensions of radical Islamism, but that this does not mean that radical Islamists are not religious. We can thus say that proponents of the argument that religion is not a significant driving factor present indirect empirical examples of what instead are driving factors, such as socioeconomic background. Proponents of the argument that Islamist radicalization is a religious phenomenon, on the other hand, have pointed to empirical evidence that religion, according to the radicals themselves, is a main motivational factor. According to Dawson (2017: 40), Osama bin Laden's public statements were political and addressed specific grievances, but "this does not mean they were not also, or even more fundamentally, religious." The point Dawson made is that political, or secular, matters cannot be separated from religion in radical Islamist thought. The attempt to dissect and uphold a sharp division between the secular and religious, according to Dawson, only makes sense if one accepts "Western liberal ideologies," or what I earlier presented as a

secular or Western bias. Wood (2015, 2017) has indeed emphasized that ISIS, and its attempt to establish a caliphate, is *very* Islamic (see also Hoffman 2017). According to him, ISIS is a religious group with carefully considered and coherent beliefs. Its members "know a great deal about scripture, law, and theology" (Wood 2017: xxviii) and their actions only make sense as part of a religiously based commitment to "returning civilization to a seventh-century environment" (Wood 2015). Dawson and Amarasingam (2017) found that, among their 20 foreign fighter interviewees, none of them gave socioeconomical marginalization as a motivation for becoming a foreign fighter; instead, they all expressed religious motivations. In his study of the cultural practices of jihadist groups, Hegghammer (2017a) found religious practices to be central. He found that reading the Quran and praying even in the midst of battle are common practices among jihadist groups. Rukmini Callimachi (2015) found that ISIS members even prayed before committing rape. There are thus empirical findings that point towards the importance of religion for radical Islamists and terrorists. In a similar vein, Dawson (2017: 41) argued that, when Bin Laden addressed grievances with, for example, the US, he framed his statements in a "religious language" with references to the Quran and other scriptures and "not to other political sources of authority." Whereas the argument among the sceptics who downplay the role of religion in Islamist radicalization and terrorism would be that framing the grievances in religious language is merely a tool of propaganda, the proponents for the argument that radical Islamists indeed are religious see the thoughts and actions of radical Islamists and terrorists as thoroughly framed by religion. Juergensmeyer (2003), for example, reasoned that images of "cosmic war" provide religious ideas that enable the occurrence of religious violence in the name of Islam. However, for him, "religion is not the problem, but it *is* problematic" (Juergensmeyer 2017: 17). This means that the initial problem is often economic and involves social tensions, but these tensions "are articulated in religious terms and seen through religious images" (Juergensmeyer 2017: 19). This religious interpretation transforms the (initial economic and social) problem into an even bigger (religious) problem as it is perceived as a "cosmic war" against Islam (see Article 4). Social, economic, and geopolitical tensions are thus *understood* by the radicals as religious (see Dawson & Amarasingam 2017), which leads to religious (Islamist) radicalization, according to the proponents of the argument that radical Islamists indeed are religious. For them, the religious and political (or secular) cannot be separated.

The present dissertation agrees with this point but also maintains that an adequate theorization is missing on how we can understand the connection between social and political conditions and religious matters in Islamist radicalization processes in the West (see Articles 3 and 4). The next section will address existing arguments for how we can reinstate religion in the analysis and will conclude with a positioning of the present dissertation in relation to this research.

The call for a reinstatement of religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization

An argument that can be found among some researchers on Islamist radicalization is that we need to understand that Islam can and has been interpreted in many different ways. The call for a reinstatement of religion has thus been formed by an emphasis of the anti-essentialist character of religion. Marranci (2006: 7) illustrated this by referring to two of his interviewees, who, according to Marranci (2006: 63-65), had read the same Islamic scriptures but had different understandings of the issues of jihad due to different life trajectories. One had lived his life in the marginalized suburbs of France, and he interpreted jihad as a final battle between Muslims and non-Muslims. The other had lived a well-off life in Italy, and he interpreted jihad as a spiritual quest for becoming the best version of oneself (see Article 3). This is an illustrative example of how an interpretation of religion is linked to social (or secular) matters. In Article 3, I argue against essentialist approaches to Islam that claim that Islam is a religion of peace and or that Islam is an inherently violent religion. The point is that such arguments assert that Islam is only one thing. Similarly, Cottee (2017: 446) argued that "there is not one Islam, but a plurality of Islams." The point of the anti-essentialist argument is that Islam, or religion in general, should be understood as a "resource on which people draw and which they use for a variety of private and public purposes" (Cottee 2017: 446). The proponents of an anti-essentialist approach to religion (whom I agree with) also argue against the idea that the level of religious knowledge is in any way an indicator of whether or not someone can have religious motivation for their thoughts and actions. Dawson (2018, 2017) thus stated that "the defenders of more conventional conceptions of the religious tradition in question can seek to distance themselves from the terrorists" but "they cannot logically […] say that the terrorists are not religious, simply because they conceive the religion differently" (Dawson 2018: 149).

Thus, the call for the reinstation of religion also calls for a way to explore or make sense of radical Islamists' interpretation of Islam. Juergensmeyer and Mona K. Sheikh (2013) have argued for a "sociotheological" approach to understanding religious violence. Sociotheology implies the attempt to "understand the reality of a particular worldview" (M.K. Sheikh 2015: 136). The point is that, in order to understand how, for example, radical Islamists understand reality, we need to take seriously *both* the social location or context in which these understandings are formed *and* religion (see Juergensmeyer 2018: 29). A sociotheological approach thus "bracket[s] truth claims" as "the point is to try to understand the reasoning behind the truth claims, not to verify them" (M.K. Sheikh 2015: 137). In this line of thought, religion can (and should) be reinstated in the analysis of Islamist radicalization processes by taking radical Islamists' own words, their worldviews, and the context in which they are formed seriously because this is the understanding of the world which they see as true and from which they act. Similarly, Dawson (2018: 149), drawing on the Thomas theorem, has insisted that "the only relevant issue is the perpetrator's conception of the action" and that "it matters little whether the beliefs in question are fantastical" (Dawson

2018: 158). In his challenge of what he calls "the curious erasure of religion from the study of religious terrorism" (Dawson 2018), he concludes that the only way we can come closer to understanding the phenomenon of Islamist radicalization, and also come closer to how we can counter it, is to listen to what radical Islamists consistently say. For them, the role of religion in terrorism and politics is clear; they are strongly religiously committed (Dawson 2018: 159; see also Wood 2017: xxvi-xxvii; Hellyer & Grossman 2019).

The present dissertation is inspired by the anti-essentialist understanding of religion and draws on the various arguments for the reinstation of religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization processes in Articles 3 and 4. The dissertation is therefore critical of the proponents of the argument that religion is not linked in any significant way to Islamist radicalization. This is linked to the three arguments for why religion is not a main driving in Islamist radicalization. The instrumental, justificatory, and lack-of-knowledge arguments as to why religion does not play a significant role have been highly criticized by the proponents of the argument that radical Islamists are religious and that religion is a significant driving factor in Islamist radicalization processes, and I agree with their critique. However, even though such an approach as the sociotheological implies that we must understand religious worldviews as intrinsically connected to the social context in which they are formed, there seems to be an inadequate theorization of *how* we can understand the connection between social and political conditions and religiosity. Article 3 thus introduces and develops the sociology of religious emotion (Riis and Woodhead 2010) as a not yet employed theoretical perspective in radicalization research. This perspective would allow us to understand religious emotions as formed within the social context and how strong religious emotions connected to radical interpretations of Islam can also initiate and amplify a religiously-based motivation or reason to either endorse violence or commit violence in the name of the perceived true understanding of Islam. Article 4 offers an analysis of interviews with former radical Islamists and utilizes the perspective of sociology of religious emotions to show how their radicalization processes were characterized by an interplay between context-specific experiences and religiosity.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter will present the theoretical perspectives, which this dissertation draws on. It will first present developments within subcultural theory and, second, theoretical perspectives from the sociology of religion with a special focus on the sociology of religious emotions.

3.1. DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN SUBCULTURAL THEORY

The Chicago School

The concept of "subculture" was established as part of mainstream sociology when it became a key concept in the work of the urban sociology of the Chicago School in the early twentieth century. Whereas deviant and criminal behavior had previously been interpreted as a result of certain "evil" personal traits, the Chicago School theorists pointed out that deviance should be understood as a "normal response" to the social and cultural context (Bennett & Khan-Harris 2004: 3; Brake 1985). Subculture was a key concept in the Chicago School; however, it was part of a broader stream of early American criminological subcultural theory, which was inspired by functionalism and understood the formation of and participation in deviant subcultures as serving a function or "solution" for the collective of the subculture. One of the key theorists of this approach to subcultures was A.K Cohen, who studied delinquent subcultures formed in and by the school system. He argued that the school is a situation in which "children of all levels come to compete for status in terms of the same set of middle-class criteria" (A.K. Cohen 1955: 112) but where working-class boys are left with feelings of inferiority (A.K. Cohen 1955: 113-115). A.K. Cohen (1955: 119) further maintained that, as the working-class boy values the criteria for middle-class status (which he cannot achieve or live up to) "he faces a problem of adjustment and is in the market for a 'solution.'" This solution was the formation and participation in "delinquent subcultures" that provided "criteria of status which these children *can* meet" (A.K. Cohen 1955: 121) and which were the opposite of the middle-class cultural criteria, such as physical strength and defiance of authorities (A.K. Cohen 1955: 132). Another example of such an approach to subcultures was Cloward and Ohlin's (1960). Drawing on Robert K. Merton (1938), who described how crime can be considered a way to achieve commonly shared goals/ends by illegitimate means, Cloward and Ohlin asserted that people participate in criminal subcultures when they experience a blockage of conventional opportunity structure (Jensen 2018a: 406; Cloward & Ohlin 1960).

Early American criminological subcultural theorists were the first to argue that subcultures should be understood as attempted collective solutions to shared problems and that subcultures can function as a way to achieve desired goals (besides A.K. Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin, other influential theorists were Shaw and McKay (1942) and Miller (1958, 1959)). This focus on subcultures as solutions to shared problems was adopted (and rethought) by the next influential wave of subcultural theory, the Birmingham School.

The Birmingham School (CCCS)

The subcultural theorists (S. Cohen 2002 [1972]; Hall and Jefferson 2006 [1975]; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1977, 1978; for overviews, see, e.g., Brake 1985; Muggleton 2005; Williams 2011; Jensen 2018a) connected to the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, also known as the Birmingham School, in the 1970s represented a range of different approaches to youth subcultures, but some common denominators can be found among them (Griffin 2011). One of these was that the CCCS adopted the idea from the Chicago School that subcultures should be seen as creative cultural answers to shared problems of young people. However, this notion was rethought from a Marxist perspective. The Marxist approach meant the rejection of the idea from A.K. Cohen that working-class boys shared the ideals of the middle-class and that they were ashamed of not living up to those ideals. Thus, the CCCS added an analysis of "the politics of subculture," which meant a focus on subcultures as both attempted answers to shared problems and as "manifestations of resistance and class dominance" (Jensen 2018a: 407). The CCCS understood society as being filled with class-based antagonisms and conflicts, and subcultures were seen as expressing this class conflict (see Jensen 2018a; Brake 1985; Muggleton 2005). Even though the CCCS conceptualized subcultures as collective "answers" or "attempted solutions" to shared problems of working-class youth, they understood these answers as symbolic in character because subcultures only provided "magical resolutions" (P. Cohen 1972: 23) as participation in subcultures did not alter the life chances of working-class youths. In fact, some subcultures contributed to the self-damnation of the working class (see Willis 1977).

Instead of relying on functionalism, the CCCS rethought the notion of subcultures as solutions to shared problems in terms of a focus on conflict and antagonisms, as well as agency and youth cultural creativity (Jensen 2018a: 408). This agency and youth cultural creativity was often analyzed through a focus on "style." According to Hebdige (1979), the style of a subculture is a way to display meaning and acts as a "semiotic resistance to the dominant order" (see Barker 2008: 415). One of the key concepts to grasp subcultural style was *bricolage*. This concept was borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss and described "the re-ordering and re-contextualization of objects to communicate fresh meanings" (Clarke 2006 [1975]: 149). Hebdige (1979) used the concept of bricolage to describe how subcultures, such as the Mods and Punks, transformed and symbolically defiled clothing and objects from the

conventional society to signal they valued the perverse and the abnormal subcultural rather than dominant values (Hebdige 1979: 107). These were examples of working-class subcultures who revolted against the class-based post-war British society through style. The CCCS understood forms of stylistic expression of revolt as part of cohesive subcultures. The connection between the structural position of the participants in these subcultures, objects used and appropriated by subcultures, and the value system of these subcultures was conceptualized as *homology*. Paul E. Willis (1978), for example, used the concept to describe the fit between the objects used by "motorbike boys," such as the motorbike and its exhaust's noise, and the masculine values and identities of the participants in the subculture (see also Clarke et al. 2006 [1975]).

The focus of the CCCS on predominantly white working-class boys and their formation and participation in subcultures was, however, criticized "from within." Some theorists from the CCCS criticized the perspective for being male-biased and gender blind in its approach to subcultures (McRobbie & Garber 2006 [1975]; McRobbie 1980, 1990). Thus, Angela McRobbie set out to explore "what happens to the study of subcultures once sexuality, girls' different (gender-defined) spaces and their different forms of resistance and accommodation are addressed" (Hall & Jefferson 2006: xvii). Another critique from a scholar closely related to the CCCS perspective was formulated by Paul Gilroy (1993) who emphasized that the CCCS had an inadequate theorization of race and ethnicity. He argued that there was a need for a focus on what happens to youth subcultures when racism, nationalism, and ethnic absolutism emerges within the subcultures and how this should be responded to within the rules and stylistic limits of the subcultures (Gilroy 1993: 2). Besides these internal critiques, there has also been external criticism that suggested abandoning the CCCS approach to subculture altogether. This approach was the post-subcultural tradition.

Post-subcultural studies

The post-subcultural critique of the CCCS was mainly directed at the CCCS's political interpretation of subcultures as resistance against class dominance. One of the first to raise this issue was Stanley Cohen (2002 [1972]), who was both part of the CCCS but also part of the group criticizing the CCCS. According to him, the CCCS put too much emphasis on the symbolic meanings of the acts of participants in subcultures and too much emphasis on resistance (S. Cohen 2002 [1972]: lviii). Thus, for him, the participants in subcultures were not always political subjects or conveying a political statement, and style was not necessarily political. Post-subcultural studies were generally based on postmodern ideas of society as fluid and fragmented, and emphasized individual autonomy over collective action. Thus, David Muggleton (2000: 48) argued against the idea that there was a coherent dominant culture that subcultures could resist against. This led post-subcultural theorists to claim that the concept of subculture should be discarded altogether. Other concepts designed to grasp the fluid and temporary state of collectivities were thus employed. Andy Bennett

(1999, 2000) applied Michel Maffesoli's (1996) concept of "neo-tribes" to understand contemporary dance music culture as the concept connoted loosely defined gatherings of people that one can easily step in and out of based on fun and pleasure. Sarah Thornton (1995: 3) reconceptualized subcultures as "taste cultures" in her study of club culture, which she understood as "communities with fluid boundaries." Stephen Miles (2000) used the concept of "lifestyle" to explain the fluidity and shifting identity politics perceived to characterize contemporary youths. Others used the concept of "scene" to draw attention to the local sites of cultural production and consumption and to emphasize the anti-essential character of youth culture (Bennett & Khan-Harris 2004: 13-14; see also Straw 1991; K. Harris 2000). All these concepts "accentuated agency, choice, reflexivity and individuality" (Jensen 2018a: 409), and they represented a break away from the Marxist inspired interpretation of subcultures by the CCCS.

Adding intersectionality to subculture

The post-subcultural focus on individuality and choice has, however, been met with some criticism. Shane Blackman (2005: 12) criticized postmodern theories of subculture for neglecting the role that social and cultural structures have on the choices available to young people (see also Hesmondhalgh 2005). A central critique of post-subcultural understandings of subculture was that it detached structural inequality from the analysis. Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson (2004: 78), for example, pointed out that contemporary dance cultures "exhibit patterns of class and racial differentiation that necessitates some form of materialist understanding." Similarly, Tracy Shildrick and Robert MacDonald (2006: 126) criticized post-subcultural theorists for tending "to ignore the youth cultural lives for less advantaged people" and that, as a consequence, post-subcultural studies had become less able to "uncover evidence of how class, and other social divisions, delimit youth cultural possibilities" (Shildrick & MacDonald 2006: 136; see also Shildrick 2006; Shildrick, Blackman & MacDonald 2009).

Arguing along the line of the critique of post-subcultural studies to put "structure back in to youth subcultural studies" (Hollingworth 2015), Sune Q. Jensen (2018a) called for a theoretical dialogue between subcultural theory and feminist accounts of intersectionality. He argued for a subcultural perspective closer to the CCCS but agreed with the critique of a lack of adequate theorization of the interplay between social positions, such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race. He believed that, by adding intersectional accounts to the CCCS, such a theorization could be met. He conceptualized this perspective as "neo-Birminghamian." This perspective was used in Article 1 and (to a lesser degree) in Article 2. The following section is based on the line of argument put forth in these articles (primarily Article 1).

Intersectional theorists have asserted that intersectional analysis should grasp the interplay among micro-, meso-, and macrolevels of the social world (Choo & Feree

2010; Hancock 2007). Even though diverse, intersectional perspectives understand different social categories as mutually constituting each other. This means that social categories, such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity, are intertwined and that analysis should treat them as such, instead of as separate or parallel categories (Henne & Troshynski 2019: Potter 2013; Trahan 2011). "We are, as humans, never just men or women (or non-binary); we are also always positioned in terms of class, ethnicity and race in ways that have consequences for our gender identities, just as gender identity will have an effect on class identity, for example (Jensen & Christensen 2011)" as noted in Article 1 (425). Jensen (2018a: 415) insisted that accounts of intersectionality can aid in the understanding of the complex politics of subculture as they help us "grasp the complexities involved in both collectively shared problems and their answers, and [provide] analytical openness towards the politics involved in youth subcultural resistance" and that they "[add] theoretical sophistication to the idea of subcultures as collective and creative answers to a shared situation, contextualized structurally and with political dimensions."

Article 1 suggests that integrating the perspective of intersectionality into subcultural theory allows us to understand participants in jihadi subcultures in a way that includes their "classed, ethnic, gendered and religious positions" (Article 1: 425). The social marginalization, or *othering*, that many empirical studies have pointed to as related to radicalization (see Cottee 2011; Seierstad 2016; J. Sheikh 2015; Walklate & Mythen 2016) can be understood as intersectional as it is related to age, class, and gender as young lower-class male Muslims are perceived to be particularly problematic. The point is that the interplay among the different social categories produces a specific form of social marginality and that the broader jihadi subculture should be "understood as a collective reaction to this marginality" and, furthermore, that this subcultural perspective also "provides tools for empirical analysis of the hybrid forms of cultural expression central to current jihadi subculture" which are expressions of the marginality (Article 1: 425). The argument of this dissertation is thus that, in order to understand and theorize why it can be attractive to become a participant in broader jihadi subcultures, we need to take into account the shared social position of the participants, as it is these related specific problems that jihadism as a subculture provides an answer to.

The present dissertation places itself within and utilizes this subcultural perspective. However, the subcultural perspective is linked to the sociology of religion, which I will present.

3.2. SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION – FROM RELIGION AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION TO A FOCUS ON EMOTIONS

The field of sociology of religion has been characterized by debates about how to define religion and about what should count as religious. A key distinction has been between narrow and broad definitions of religion. This discussion composes an

immense research field that cannot be covered satisfactorily within the scope of these summary chapters; however, essentially, a narrow (or substantive) definition of religion hinges on identifying the "substance" or "essence" of religion, while a broad (sometimes referred to as functional) definition focusses on what religion *does* and is then more inclusive of differing forms of religion (see Roberts & Yamane 2016). Without going into this debate, this dissertation positions itself in a broad, social constructivist conception of religion as it allows "a theorization of religion that takes the subjective intentional explanations of the radicals seriously […] and thus focuses on the subjective meaningfulness provided by religion" (Article 3). The following will thus present a social constructivist approach to religion. This will be followed by a focus on religious emotions.

A social constructivist approach to religion

To understand the social constructivist approach to religion, we can start with Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1983 [1966]), who theorized how reality is socially constructed through processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Through these processes, human beings make sense of the world. In other words, human actors take the order of reality as something given, even though they themselves construct reality. They applied this understanding of social construction and order in their contributions to the sociology of religion. Berger (1973) saw religion as a way for individuals to make sense and meaning of experiences in the social world. When a meaningful order is established through religion, it can be given a sacred character (see Hamilton 2001: 181-182). Similarly, Luckmann (1967) understood religion as ways for individuals to acquire a sense of self. However, for Luckmann, religion included the so-called "invisible religions." By this, he meant that individuals increasingly constructed identity, or sense of self, outside established religious institutions as a result of the secularization of society, but that this acquisition of sense of self was essentially a religious process (see Hamilton 2001: 184). Berger and Luckmann's approaches to religion have been criticized for a number of reasons. One has been that Luckmann's inclusion of "invisible religions" in the realm of the religious makes the division between the religious and the non-religious obsolete (see Berger 1973). And, Berger has been criticized for an overemphasis on the human desire for order and stability (see Furseth & Repstad 2007: 103-104; Beckford 2003: 29). Without disregarding these criticisms, the dissertation builds on these early social constructivist conceptions of religion. It does, however, lie closest to the social constructivist conception of religion as derived from James A. Beckford (2003).

Beckford's (2003: 2) starting point was that religion is a social phenomenon. He reasoned that the means by which religion is expressed, such as human ideas, feelings, and practices, are products of social interaction and that they, in turn, influence the social and cultural life of individuals. According to him, social scientific studies of religion should aim at understanding these social processes whereby certain things are understood or constructed as religious (Beckford 2003: 3). This means that religion is

not an object that exists outside or is independent of human actors (Beckford 2003: 4). He understood religion as an "interpretative category" that human actors apply to a range of different phenomena to make sense or meaning of them. He therefore insisted that analytical attention be placed on the ways human actors "do religion" *in particular situations* (Beckford 2003: 25). This implies a need for attention to the social context and that we should not think of religion as something generic or as bound solely to formalistic and institutionalized practices of religion. Beckford also inscribed himself within an anti-essentialist approach to religion. His social constructivist approach was not concerned with "truth claims" or "the reality status" of objects of religious beliefs (Beckford 2003: 2). This means that he made no assumption that, behind human actors' use of religion, lies a "real" or "essential" religion (Beckford 2003: 20). Instead, his social constructivist approach reasoned that it is exactly the uses of religion that *is* religion (see also Marranci 2006). For Beckford (2003: 24), "religion is […] therefore 'real' in the sense of producing effects on some human lives and societies." His social constructivist approach to religion was then also an alternative to understanding religion as an epi-phenomenon of social forces (Beckford 2003: 194). If phenomena are understood or constructed as religious, then they are religious. This also means that, even though there can be political, ethnic, cultural, and other forces connected to religion and religious conflicts, "religious conflicts are real in their consequences" if human actors understand them as religious in nature (Beckford 2003: 212).

The dissertation draws on this social constructivist understanding of religion in its conceptualization of the role of religion in Islamist radicalization processes (see Articles 3 and 4). However, in order to understand the social processes of how things are constructed as religious for radical Islamists, I propose that it is fruitful to combine the social constructivist approach to religion with approaches to religion that focus on emotions as this can give insights into the link between strong religious emotions and the social and societal context in which they emerge and develop.

The sociology of religious emotions

Emotionalist approaches to religion understand religion as "derived from emotional or affective states of mind" (Hamilton 2001: 55). In his anthropological research into tribal societies, Bronislaw Malinowski (1936) found religion to be rooted in the emotional outcome of conditions of the everyday life of the inhabitants. Malinowski understood religion as cathartic as it provides human actors with a way to deal with the emotional stress that characterizes human life (Hamilton 2001: 59). Clifford Geertz (1966) had another view on religion and emotions. According to him, religion did not provide a way to get relief of or to avoid certain emotions stemming from societal pressure; instead, religion provided a way to live with these emotions and place them in a meaningful context so that people can understand and accept them (Hamilton 2001: 179). This resembles Max Weber's (1995 [1920]) classic notion of religion as the main source from which people construct meaning and make sense of

their reality. This dissertation draws on these early theorizations on religious emotions and the construction of meaning. However, more specifically, it utilizes and further develops Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead's (2010) *sociology of religious emotions* as a way to further understand and conceptualize how the emotional outcome of social experiences can be reinterpreted or constructed as religious emotions.

Riis and Woodhead (2010: 4) criticized scholars of religion for being mostly interested in religious texts and doctrines and less interested in how religion affects the everyday lives of ordinary people. Their point was that it is only the few that intensively study religious texts. This is an argument for understanding religion as more than formalistic practices related to religious texts and doctrines. According to Riis and Woodhead, those with little religious schooling and those from economically marginalized backgrounds are attracted to religions that speak to the emotions (Riis & Woodhead: 4). Thus, emotions are at the forefront of Riis and Woodhead's conception of religion. In order to understand how emotions become religious or what characterizes religious emotions, they stressed the importance of *context*. This means that emotions should not be reduced to an inner state or as something that is only private or subjective. Instead, Riis and Woodhead (2010: 5) argued, emotions are constructed in interplay between human actors and the social and structural setting they are a part of. Emotions are then understood as relational constructs. In the words of Riis and Woodhead (2010: 53), human actors are "always already located within complex patterns of social and symbolic relationship, and 'emotion' is a name we give to the multidimensional processes by which subjects navigate and negotiate within them." It is a dialectical process where "our feelings shape our reality, and what we take to be real shapes our feelings" (Riis & Woodhead 2010: 67). A central point that this dissertation derives from Riis and Woodhead is that emotions are shaped by what people (and groups) perceive to be real and that emotions shape our understanding of reality.

To conceptualize how "emotions relate embodied agents to their wider social and material-symbolic interactions," Riis and Woodhead (2010: 69) introduced the concept of *emotional regimes.* They used this concept to emphasize that emotions structure the social life of, for example, families and fan clubs, but also of religious communities. They argued that such "social units" have emotional regimes, including (religious) elites and authorities, that structure what individuals can feel, how they can feel it, and how they can express their emotions (Riis & Woodhead 2010: 10). In order to further understand the emotional regimes of religious communities, they proposed the concept of *religious emotional regimes*. What distinguishes religious regimes from others is that they are socially constructed as religious. Thus, according to Riis and Woodhead (2010: 54) any emotion can be religious. They criticized scholars of religion who have claimed that religions inherently induce human actors to be kind and joyful (e.g., Armstrong 2007). Instead, Riis and Woodhead insisted that all emotions, including hatred and anxiety, can be religious. What makes them religious is that they occur "within a religious context and [are] integral to its social and

symbolic relations" (Riis & Woodhead 2010: 54). What furthermore distinguishes religious emotional regimes from other emotional regimes is that they relate to "an 'alternate ordering' that goes beyond the orderings of everyday life" (Riis & Woodhead 2010: 70). This means that religion or religious emotional regimes offer an order to emotions that is perceived as true and foundational. By bringing an alternate ordering to life, religion offers a new structure of relationships and an emotional restructuring (Riis and Woodhead 2010: 70). Human actors are given a way to interpret and live their lives as emotions are understood in a wider (religious) perspective. Riis and Woodhead (2010: 11) also described how joining a religion includes the experience of a new way of feeling about self, others, society, and the world.

Another point we can derive from Riis and Woodhead is that the emotional ordering of religious emotional regimes can also serve to identify who does not belong to the group (Riis & Woodhead 2010: 79). Riis and Woodhead (2010: 90) stressed that "that which threatens the objects of emotional trust and devotion is likely to be feared and condemned. Regimes that are experienced as incompatible, yet threatening, may be hated and aggressively attacked […] Religious passion can inspire people to kill and to sacrifice their own lives." This is another important concept the dissertation derives from Riis and Woodhead as it points to the other/dark side of being assured of one's belief and understanding of reality. This is explored in Articles 3 and 4.

3.3. COMBINING THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM SUBCULTURAL THEORY AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

The preceding sections have presented and discussed different theoretical perspectives that the dissertation employs in the examination and theorization of how jihadism can be attractive given the specific social and societal circumstances of individuals and groups. However, the subcultural perspective and the social constructivist and emotional perspective of the sociology of religion *are* connected in important ways to the analytical approach of this dissertation. The argument is thus that it is analytically fruitful to understand the social constructivist and sociology of religious emotion perspectives on religion as related to the subcultural perspective. In this way, we can understand part of the subcultural answer provided in Western jihadi subculture (Cottee 2019) as religious answers or reactions to their specific social position. The important sociological implication of joining a religious group is, as we can derive from Riis and Woodhead, that it gives a new way of understanding oneself, society, and the world. As explained in Article 3, it might also invoke a sense of empowerment through a perceived membership of a group of a "chosen few" or a religious omen of a greater purpose in life. It is a way to render intelligible why some young Muslims find it attractive to "adhere to radical interpretations of Islam, as they are ways of making underprivileged ethno-class experiences meaningful" (Article 3). This can thus be understood as a "religious" part of the subcultural answer to a shared situation

of economic or social marginalization and other issues such as perceived or real discrimination. As noted in Article 3, "previous personal feelings of anger towards society […] connected to being a Muslim can be transformed into strong religious emotions in a Salafi-Jihadist religious context." By further developing the perspective of the sociology of religious emotions, we can then theorize how social and societal circumstances can be "answered" in a religious way in jihadist groups and how this can be attractive to some young people who identify as Muslims in the West. Furthermore, we can understand the formation of strong religious emotions as collective processes taking place within jihadi subcultural milieus. In this way, even though the perspectives are used separately in the articles (Articles 1 and 2 employ a subcultural perspective, while Articles 3 and 4 employ sociology of religious emotions), they are connected on an analytical level and complement each other.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In 1988, Schmid and Albert J. Jongman published a review of terrorism research. They concluded that the research field was characterized by superficial methods and a lack of new data (Schmid & Jongman 1988). Andrew Silke (2001) conducted a "health check" on terrorism research from 1995-1999 and again from 2002-2004 (Silke 2007) and concluded that researchers still relied mostly on secondary data analysis. This was also a finding in Neumann and Scott Kleinmann's (2013) assessment of the academic literature on radicalization from 1980 to 2010. Sageman (2014) furthermore claimed that terrorism research was in a state of stagnation. One of the reasons for why the research field on terrorism and radicalization have been characterized by a lack of primary sources and, thus, a less empirically rigorousness than other research fields is that the research subjects are hard-to-reach. Bart Schuurman (2018), however, found that from 2007-2016, the use of primary data increased considerably and that scholars had begun to adapt a wider range of different data-gathering techniques. This dissertation can be understood as part of this trend. The methodological approach of this dissertation can best be described as what Orvar Löfgren (1987: 78), with an inspiration from Lévi-Strauss (1969), called *empirical bricolage*. This means that the empirical material collected and analyzed in this dissertation is a result of the employment of a range of different methodological approaches. By combining different empirical material, I have attempted to battle the problem of the access to and the data basis of this hard-to-reach field of study. The following presents an overview of the empirical bricolage.

4.1. OVERVIEW OF THE EMPIRICAL BRICOLAGE

Interviews:

- Five interviews with former so-called radical Islamists ("formers"):

  Jens, an ethnic Danish male convert who had been convicted for planning a terrorist attack.

  Ali, ethnic minority man with parents from Somalia who was part of a group where three had travelled to Syria.

  Gittan, ethnic Swedish female convert, married to a radical Islamist convicted of planning a terrorist attack, and part of a strict Salafist milieu.

Emelie, ethnic Swedish female convert, married to a radical Islamist, and part of a strict Salafist milieu.

Svend, ethnic Danish male convert and part of a group that wanted to establish a worldwide caliphate.

- Twelve interviews with "professionals" connected with the prevention of radicalization:

  Chairperson of an organization that helps families who are worried about their children in relation to radicalization issues.

  Prison priest with personal knowledge of radicalization processes inside and outside the prison system.

  Two interviews with a leader of a youth club in an area that has seen several cases of radicalization. He was also a former professional within the work of prevention of radicalization.

  Prison guard with knowledge about radicalization in prison.

  Group interview with three men from an organization which helps marginalized youths considered at risk of radicalization.

  "Street worker" with both professional and personal knowledge about radicalization processes.

  Municipality employee working with radicalization issues and with personal knowledge of radicalization processes.

  Former mentor for youths at risk of radicalization.

  Representative from an organization that helps marginalized youths considered at risk of radicalization.

  Leading figure in a prevention of radicalization model in Denmark.

  Key person within municipality work, prisons, and intelligence service on radicalization issues in Denmark.

- Interviews with other people related to the issue of radicalization:

  Representative from a mosque.

Former inmate with personal knowledge of former foreign fighters and radical Islamist milieus in Denmark.

Person closely related to a group with which several foreign fighters allegedly were affiliated.

Spokesperson from a mosque that several foreign fighters allegedly have been in close contact with.

Journalist who has been in Syria several times and knows several foreign fighters and other radicalized people.

Journalist with close contact to people who have been part of al-Shabaab.

Access to interview transcripts of interviews conducted by Umair Ahmed and Lasse Simo Friis Hansen, students of Sune Qvotrup Jensen, including interviews with Ali (the same former radical interviewed for this dissertation), three imams, police personnel working with the prevention of radicalization, and a local neighborhood crime prevention personnel.

Biographical and journalistic sources used in articles and as background material:

Soei, A. (2018). *Omar - og de andre - vrede unge mænd og modborgerskab* [Omar – and the Others – Angry Young Men and Counter-citizenship]. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag.

Khaja, N. (2017). *Du må ikke græde - for så mister du blod. Reportager fra borgerkrigen i Syrien* [You Must Not Cry – Because You Will Lose Blood. Reports From the Civil War in Syria]. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

Sheikh, J. (2015). *Danmarks børn i hellig krig* [Denmark's Children in Holy War]. Copenhagen: Lindhardt & Ringhof.

Seierstad, Å. (2016). *To Søstre – Jihad-brude i Kalifatet* [Two Sisters – Jihad Brides in the Caliphate]. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

Albæk, M.M., Dalsgaard, L. & Mikkelsen, N.R. (2019). *Terroristen fra Nørrebro – jagten på Omar el-Hussein* [The Terrorist from Nørrebro – the Hunt for Omar el-Hussein]. Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag.

Virtual ethnography

> Virtual ethnographic inspired research on the symbolic and stylistic cultural repertoire of jihadi subculture, consisting of jihadi rap material such as songs, videos, and lyrics.

4.2. ACCESS TO A HARD-TO-REACH FIELD – RECRUITING INTERVIEWEES

John Horgan (2012) argued that research on radicalization for different reasons is characterized by a lack of descriptions of the processes of gaining access. This chapter should be seen as a contribution to offsetting this. This section will focus on the process of recruiting interviewees, which reflects the hard-to-reach character of the research field and the sensitive topic of radicalization (see Article 5). Recruiting the interviewees involved several obstacles. Briefly put, I followed strategies such as Amarasingam and Dawson's (2018: 8) and decided to speak to anyone who would speak to me. In respect to the conception of empirical bricolage introduced in the introduction to this chapter, the interview part of my empirical material was therefore in itself a form of bricolage.

Attempting to access the radicals themselves and family members

In the beginning of the research process, I had the ambition of interviewing radical Islamists themselves, or their family members, who could speak about radicalization processes from a deep personal knowledge (see Speckhard 2009; Amarasingam & Dawson 2018). However, I never succeeded in getting access to these interviewees. One of the strategies I used was through snowballing and gatekeepers. Horgan (2012: 204) emphasized that one access route to interviewees in the field of radicalization research is through "formal contact with other gatekeepers." As I will describe below, I did succeed in getting interviews with current and former professionals connected to the work within the prevention of radicalization and other people closely related to the issue of radicalization. As a strategy, I asked all these interviewees if they knew current or former radical Islamists or family members that would be interested in speaking to me. In that way, I attempted to use the interviewees as gatekeepers. Some of the "attempted gatekeepers" refused to put me in contact with people of interest as they wanted to protect their relationship with them. However, the majority of the attempted gatekeepers knew people of interest and were willing to facilitate contact with them. However, I often did not hear back from the attempted gatekeepers, even though I contacted them several times after the interviews. Those who did contact me again said that the people of interest that they knew did not want to talk to me. This was most likely an issue of trust. When doing research in hard-to-reach fields and research on sensitive topics, access often relies on how the researcher is perceived in

the eyes of the research subjects (see Article 5; for an overview, see Jensen 2018b; Yates 2004). Even though the attempted gatekeepers had the trust of the people they knew, and even though the gatekeepers could vouch for me and were asked to say that the interviews would be anonymized and not compromise their safety or legal status in any way, the current or former radicals and family members still did not want to participate (the recruitment of the formers that I *did* succeed in recruiting will be described below). Talking with or about current people involved in radical Islamist milieus always involves a risk of admitting things that, if learned by law enforcement, could lead to legal investigations (Speckhard 2009: 200), and this could have affected the potential interviewees' decision of not wanting to participate.

Another strategy I employed was contacting known foreign fighters and family members of foreign fighters directly via personal messages on Facebook. In total, I contacted seven people in this way. Before travelling to Syria as a foreign fighter was given the same legal and security attention as it later was, some people from Denmark went there and came back. I wrote to them, rather naïvely I realize now in in retrospect, that I had heard that they had been to Syria, that I was doing a research project on Islamist radicalization processes in Denmark, and that I would like to talk to them. Not surprisingly, I never heard back from any of them. However, in the same way, I contacted family members of known foreign fighters from Denmark. One, who had a brother who had died in Syria fighting for ISIS, said that he did not want to participate in *anything*. Another, who had two brothers who died fighting for ISIS, said that he liked the premise of my research project of understanding why young people from Denmark would find it attractive to join ISIS; however, he replied that the loss of his brothers was still too painful for him to talk about. Thus, there were both aggressive rejections and rejections due to emotional reasons. The other family members of known foreign fighters whom I contacted never replied.

These are of course issues that have to do with trust when trying to interview "reluctant respondents" (Adler & Adler 2001). Put another way, I was simply "too far away" to be able to gain their trust. This distance can be described in terms of social positionality. Being a white, ethnic Danish academic, I may have been seen as simply *too different* from the potential interviewees' point of view and maybe as a representative of a Danish society that they may have experienced as critical or hostile towards Muslims. This can have added to their perception of me as untrustworthy. Recruiting interviewees from radical Islamist milieus or their family members would have required more time-consuming strategies in order to build up trust, such as what was done by Hemmingsen (2011) who attended trials in order to gain access to radical Islamist milieus, but such strategies would also not have guaranteed success. In describing her interviews with people involved in Islamist terrorism around the world, Anne Speckhard (2009: 205) explained that access to terrorists is the most difficult in societies where counter-terrorism measures are active. Denmark would surely be such a place. I therefore opted for an alternative solution. Instead of interviewing current

radical Islamists, I decided to try to recruit *former* radical Islamists, also known as "formers."

Recruiting formers

Whether or not formers are a reliable or fruitful source of information about radicalization processes has been a discussion in the research field. Marina Tapley and Gordon Clubb (2019) cautioned that formers' investment in turning their back on their past might lead to exaggeration or an overselling of their previous experiences. Speckhard (2009) noted that formers might have useful data but that the data they can provide is necessarily "dated." Contrarily, Horgan (2012: 203) asserted that the purpose of interviewing formers is to grasp past experiences and processes of radicalization, and that they are often willing to disclose substantial details about their life. Similarly, Marco Nilsson (2018) argued that formers are in a good position to self-evaluate why they became radical Islamists and can reflect on their experiences. As will be shown further on, this was also the case of the formers interviewed for this study. I agree with Horgan and others that formers are a fruitful way of obtaining data on processes of radicalization from people who themselves have experienced such processes on their own body, even though there are of course possible biases when interviewing formers. The interviews with the formers will be discussed below. Here, I will deal with how I recruited the five formers interviewed for this dissertation.

The first former that was interviewed was Jens. I initially contacted him through a journalist. Horgan (2012) listed journalists as potential gatekeepers in this hard-to-reach field (see also Juergensmeyer 2020: 57). I knew that Jens had previously been in contact with a specific journalist and had made appearances in Danish media about his life in the radical Islamist milieu in Denmark. Consequently, I contacted the journalist via email and wrote that I had seen Jens in the media and that I thought it looked like the journalist and Jens had a close relation and that going through the journalist could be a productive way of coming into contact with Jens. The journalist forwarded my email to Jens with a note that he could contact me about an interview. After a while, Jens wrote an email to me stating that only a fraction of his story was told in the media and asked what I believed he could contribute to my research project. I wrote that his story could give valuable insight into how some people end up in radicalized milieus, and also that it could help prevent others from going through the same processes as Jens. I also promised him anonymity. He replied that he was keen on letting others learn from his experiences and that he would like to participate in an interview. The successful recruitment of Jens as an interviewee had first depended on his trustworthy relationship with the journalist, and second on Jens's desire to contribute to preventing Islamist radicalization through his own story.

The second former that was interviewed was Ali. He was initially contacted through the criminologist Umair Ahmed, who was a student of Jensen. Ahmed functioned as a gatekeeper. Using connections of former students is not unusual in research on

radicalization and terrorism (see Juergensmeyer 2020: 58). Ahmed gave Ali's email address to Jensen. Jensen wrote to Ali that we believed we could learn a lot from his radicalization experiences, that we would like to interview him, and that he would be anonymized. Ali agreed to be interviewed. The successful recruitment of Ali, as in the case with Jens, had depended on the relation of trust between him and a gatekeeper.

The third former that I interviewed was Gittan. She was recruited directly by me. She had gone public about her experience of going in and out of radical Islamist milieus, so I contacted her via a personal message on Twitter. I wrote that I was very interested in hearing about her experiences, and that interviewing her also would be part of a larger goal of helping in preventing Islamist radicalization. She replied that she "of course" wanted to participate. Much like Jens, the successful recruitment of Gittan, to a large extent, was a result of her wanting to help prevent radicalization by telling her story to me.

Concerning her experiences with interviewing radical Islamists, Speckhard (2009: 206) reported that interviewees who had a positive interview experience often led the researcher to other potential interviewees. This form of snowballing resulted in the recruitment of the fourth former that I interviewed, Emelie. In the end of the interview, I asked Gittan if she knew other people like herself that had been through radicalization experiences. After the interview, Gittan sent my email to Emelie, who later contacted me. She wrote that she would like to participate in an interview with me as she had been part of a "strict Salafist network." I replied that her story would be of great relevance to my research. She replied that it felt good that she was going to contribute to research on this matter. The recruitment of Emelie was first dependent on her relationship with Gittan, and that Gittan was willing to facilitate the contact. Second, Emelie was very keen to participate as she hoped her story could help prevent others from becoming radical Islamists.

The fifth former that I interviewed was Svend. Much like the case with Gittan, I contacted him directly, as he had been in the media about his experiences with the radical Islamist milieu in Denmark. At the time, he worked in the prevention of radicalization, and I contacted him via email to ask if he wanted to participate in an interview. He said that he did not want to talk about prevention of radicalization, as such, but that he would only talk about his own experience going into, being part of, and coming out of the radical Islamist milieu. The recruitment of Svend relied on him being able to tell his story, which was also the purpose of the interview.

Choice of words is important when interviewing people about sensitive topics (see Adler & Adler 2001) such as radicalization. Instead of the word "terrorism," Speckhard (2009: 209), for example, used "martyrdom operations" when contacting potential interviewees. As was the case with the preparation for the interviews with the people working within the prevention of radicalization and other people related to

the issue of radicalization (as described in Article 5), I knew that radicalization, Islam, and Muslims, in general, are a highly debated issues in Denmark and that the concept of radicalization is ethnicized and inscribed in a specific discourse. In my recruitment of the formers, however, I used the concept "Islamist radicalization," as I had to live up ethical standards of informed consent (see also Article 5). Most of the formers that I contacted did not express concern or criticism about the concept prior to the interview. However, two former Islamists that I managed to find and contact did not result in interviews. One did not reply, even though I got his contact information from a journalist he had previously worked with and trusted. The reason that the other did not want to participate, however, did not only relate to the choice of the word of "radicalization" but also to the theoretical approach of the study as he criticized the project's focus on "masculinity studies and radicalization" as one of the latest "trend theories" about why people want to join conflicts and battles.

Recruiting "professionals" and other people related to the issue of Islamist radicalization

Interviewing formers can be seen as a workaround in terms of doing research on this hard-to-reach group. Another workaround that I employed was to interview 12 different actors working within the prevention of radicalization, and six other people related to radicalization issues. However, eight professionals working within the prevention of radicalization and seven other actors related to radicalization declined to be interviewed or never responded. The process of recruiting these different actors for interviews also reflected that doing research on radicalization is doing research on a hard-to-reach field and a sensitive topic.

The preparation prior to contacting the interviewees and what I said to them and the thoughts behind the wording I used have been discussed in depth in Article 5, so I will not go further into this here. Here, through typical examples, I will describe how I found the professionals and other actors related to the issue of radicalization. The recruitment strategies can be described as snowballing and personal contacts. An example was the recruitment of a prison priest. A colleague in the criminology department at Aalborg University suggested that I contact the prison priest whom she had worked with in another research project. I wrote an email to the priest asking if she would be interested in an interview about radicalization processes, which she was. After the interview, she told me about a monthly event she organized where current and former inmates came to her meeting room in a large city in Denmark and talked about different subjects. She suggested that I attend these meetings, as it could be a way to gain trust among some of the current and former inmates that could be of interest of me to talk to. I attended three of these events. I then tried to approach some of the current and former inmates whom the prison priest thought would be especially relevant for me to talk to. This led to conversations in the meeting room during breaks. Some of these conversations did not amount to any actual usable or relevant empirical material, but they did help build my trustworthiness among the attendants of the

meetings. Consequently, I did get the contact information of one current and one former inmate of interest concerning the issue of radicalization. I was in contact with the current inmate over the phone some months after the meeting, but when I called, he could not talk. I was never able to reach him again. However, I did manage to come in contact with the former inmate. He was willing to participate in an interview, and we met up some months after the event to do the interview. He was a former inmate who had been in prison with several foreign fighters, and he was from an area where he knew several people involved in radical Islamist milieus. Another interviewee that I recruited from the meetings with the prison priest was a prison guard that drove the inmates from the prison to the meeting in the city. During one of the meetings, I interviewed him in an adjacent room about his knowledge of radicalization in the prison system and outside. The interview with the prison priest was thus an example of how personal contacts lead to interviews that then lead to further snowballing. Another example was an interview with a former mentor for young people who were suspected of moving towards radical Islamist milieus. I had met him at a conference on prevention of radicalization and in other settings, and during our talks, I asked if he would be interested in participating in an interview with me. This interview lead to an interview with a person within law enforcement closely linked to the work on prevention of radicalization, as the former mentor had worked with him earlier and gave me advice on how to contact the law enforcement interviewee. A third example was an interview with a representative from a mosque that was facilitated through the aforementioned Umair Ahmed.

Using gatekeepers was, however, not always successful. In several cases, I called people that I knew from earlier research projects that I believed might be able to put me in contact with different relevant actors. Yet, even though my gatekeepers often gave me names and contact information of specific people, I often never heard from them or was rejected in my proposal for an interview. Predominantly, these rejections came from local neighborhood associations, whose members I wanted to interview because of their close knowledge of youth culture in their specific areas. However, either they did not respond or they rejected my proposal for an interview saying that they did not want to participate in an interview about radicalization. One way to look at these forms of rejection can be as another case of a lack of trust. In order for me to obtain these interviews, I would likely have had to have a closer relationship or connection to the local associations – even if the gatekeepers vouched for me.

In other cases, however, I contacted the interviewees directly. I researched who had positions or ran organizations that revolved around the prevention of radicalization, and I contacted them through email or over the phone, explained my research interest, and asked if they would be interested in participating in interviews. The majority accepted to be interviewed, but some did not want to participate in an interview about radicalization (see Article 5). I also directly contacted two mosques. After contact through email, a representative from one of the mosques agreed to an interview. The other mosque was contacted through its official Facebook page. After explaining my

research interest in radicalization processes and after several months, I finally got the answer that they could not help me with respect to this particular subject.

Recruiting "professionals" and other people related to the issue of radicalization turned out to be a workaround in terms of doing research on the hard-to-reach group of radical Islamists. These individuals were, to a certain degree, accessible interviewees. There were, however, still rejections because of the interview's focus on radicalization. The sensitive character of the concept of "radicalization" has been dealt with in Article 5.

4.3. INTERVIEWING THE FORMERS

The following section will describe the interviews with the five formers. The section will describe the setting of the interviews and positionality between me and the interviewees, my interview approach, ethical concerns when interviewing formers, and how the interviews were coded.

Setting and positionality

In my correspondence with the five formers prior to the interviews, I made it clear that they could choose the place and time for the interview. My main goal was to get the interviewees to feel as comfortable as possible in a situation where they were going to talk about their personal (and sensitive) radicalization experiences. As a result of letting them choose the place of the interviews, the interview settings differed across the five interviews. Common to all the face-to-face interviews was, however, that I brought different snacks, cake, sodas, or cookies to the session. This was an attempt to make the interviewees feel more comfortable. Reflecting on her interviews with terrorists, Speckhard (2009: 216) described how she never showed up to an interview empty handed but always brought chocolates or some other gifts. I never saw the snacks that I brought to the interviews as being gifts. They was meant as something that could be shared during the interview and could help ease the potential tense interview situation and facilitate an atmosphere where the interviewees would be more willing to share their personal stories.

Another common aspect of the interviews with the five formers was that four of them had told about their radicalization processes in other settings previously. Some had publicly told about their experiences to journalists, while others had held presentations connected to the work on prevention of radicalization about their experiences or talked to social workers. In some sense, they were thus a kind of "trained speakers." I believe that this affected the positionality in the interviews. Having told about their experiences before, the formers had also been asked questions about their earlier life by a range of different people. My positionality as a relatively young, ethnic Danish, presumed Christian academic was in many ways different from the positionality of the formers. Even though four of them were converts and were ethnic Danish (or

Swedish), they had had life trajectories vastly different from mine and three of the formers still identified as Muslims. However, they all were willing to talk about their experiences. As I explored in Article 5, the professionals and other actors related to Islamist radicalization that I interviewed often wanted to discuss the concept of radicalization. Apart from one former, Ali, who in the end of the interview stated that he preferred to use the word "extremist," none of the formers engaged in discussions about terminology. They were, in fact, very willing tell their radicalization experience to me and answer my questions. This may have been the result of them being trained speakers used to being asked questions. Being trained speakers could have mitigated the differences between the interviewees and me. Another way of mitigating differences between us was finding a common ground in a critique of Western aggressions in Muslim countries, which most of the formers still found critical and initiated discussions about in the interviews. This was common in most of the interviews with the formers; however, the following will describe more in detail the positionality and the settings of the different interviews.

The first interview was with Jens, an ethnic Danish convert to Islam who had been committed of planning a terrorist attack. This interview is described in detail as it exemplifies common themes regarding setting and positionality experienced in the other interviews. I was the lead interviewer, but Jensen also asked questions. We both decided to participate in the interview for two reasons. One was academic; as it was the first interview with a former, we both attended it so that we could complement each other during the interview and both discuss if the interview guide should be revised for the next interviews. The other reason was related to security. Even though we knew that Jens had talked to a journalist and that he no longer adhered to radical interpretations of Islam, we did see it as a security precaution to both attend the interview. This was related to the different positionalities between us and Jens. He had adhered to a worldview very different from (and hostile towards) what we would be perceived as adhering to in respect to our particular positionality. Meeting Jens, however, defused any concerns in this regard. Prior to the interview, Jens wrote an email saying that he preferred that the interview would take place in his apartment in a large city in Denmark. However, a few days before the interview, he changed the venue and wanted the interview to take place in his elderly mother's home in the same city. Jensen and I arrived in a taxi from the train station, and we were unsure exactly which house it was – that was until we saw Jens on the doorstep dressed in a traditional Islamic robe with a black vest and a long beard. When meeting an interviewee, the first level of trust often occurs in the first seconds, and new levels of trust can be built as the meeting and interview continue (Speckhard 2009: 211). This first meeting with Jens, on the one hand, exemplified the difference between us and Jens. He looked *very* Islamic and very unlike us. Still identifying as a devout Muslim and dressing as such, but now distancing himself from radical interpretations of the religion, his clothing and beard could have been a way for him to signal to us that this version of Islam that he now followed was the right version of Islam. But, on the other hand, the first meeting with Jens also showed the sameness among us, as Jens greeted us with a very

distinct accent from the area of Denmark he was from. He was, in a way, very different from us, but also, we were much alike. We had brought cake to the interview, but so had Jens. We started the conversation with jokes about the abundance of cake we needed to devour during the interview. This had the effect of building trust between us and him. From our perspective, it showed that we were not afraid of him, and he also showed that he was not afraid of us. We sat down at his mother's dinner table in her living room. Jens seemed to relax more and more during the start of our conversation, and he did not seem to be affected by being interviewed by the two of us. He did, however, emphasize that we were only allowed to record the interview if he were anonymized. During the interview, he referred to and criticized a Danish TV station for an undercover documentary on fraud in Danish mosques. He might thus have felt a need to assure that we were not going to use the interview in any such way. Even though Jens had talked about his radicalization experience to a journalist and was a form of trained speaker, he was nonetheless a fragile interviewee. He had been in jail for planning a terrorist attack, and now suffered mental problems such as anxiety from experiences in his past. Bringing cake and showing a warm interest in him was a way for us to ease the tension in the interview. This seemed to work, as he was willing to share his story. A similar interviewee was Emelie, an ethnic Swedish female convert who was part of a radical Islamist milieu. She was also a fragile interviewee, but unlike the other formers, she had not told her story to anyone in a long time. The interview with her took place in a borrowed meeting room in a library in a large city in Denmark. I had brought cookies, and the library served coffee and tea. Emelie did seem nervous prior to the interview, but the coffee and tea seemed to help calm her down, and as the interview got started, she was open and willing to tell her story.

The second interview was with Ali, an ethnic minority man who was part of a radical Islamist group where three travelled to Syria as foreign fighters. This interview was, like the interview with Jens, conducted by both Jensen and me for the same reasons as with Jens, but also because the contact to Ali was established through a former student of Jensen. We interviewed Ali in a public library in a large city in Denmark. We had arranged access to a private meeting room as Ali wanted a place where he could "talk freely." We had brought cookies and the library served coffee, and the setting seemed to suit Ali. He was willing to talk about his radicalization experience. He was the most practiced speaker of all the formers. He had held several presentations about his experiences with radicalization and seemed used to talking about it with people with the similar positionalities as ours. As mentioned, he did question our usage of the concept of radicalization towards the end of the interview, but it did not affect the interview as such (as it did with the interviews with the professionals and other people related to the issue of radicalization; see Article 5). Other experienced speakers were Gittan, an ethnic Swedish female convert to Islam, who had been part of a radical Islamist milieu and married to a jihadist, and Svend, an ethnic Danish male convert who was part of a radical Islamist milieu. The interview with Gittan was conducted over a video message app, and the interview with Svend

was conducted via phone. I wanted to interview both of them face-to-face but was unable to travel to Sweden to meet with Gittan, and I became sick when I had the interview date with Svend in a large city in Denmark. We had not been able to find another date, so the compromise was a phone call, which he preferred over a video interview. As these interviews were not face-to-face, I was not able to influence the setting as with the other interviews. These interviews were initiated almost at the beginning of the conversation. I tried to make facial expressions in the video interview and sounds over the phone that would express my sincere interest and genuine care in order for them to trust me (see Speckhard 2009). This was difficult when not being face-to-face. However, Gittan and Svend both gave in-depth insights into their radicalization experiences. This could of course also have be the result of them being experienced speakers. They seemed to be able to switch on their "story telling mode" and they were willing to answer my questions.

Common to most of the interviews with the formers was that they were trained speakers. But my interview technique itself also had the purpose of facilitating narratives about their life and what had led to their radicalization experiences.

Narrative-inspired interview technique

In her recommendations of taking narratives seriously, Susan E. Chase (1995) stressed that qualitative interviews should consist of questions that encourage the interviewee to give narrative accounts from their life history. Chase noted that this has the advantage that the interviewee takes a form of responsibility for the interview, but also that specific narratives strengthen the analysis between the particular and general social phenomena. Lois Presser and Sandberg (2015) have argued for a narrative approach to criminology (see also Sandberg 2018; Presser & Sandberg 2019). By asking questions in a way that facilitates narratives, we can obtain knowledge about the criminal's own life and the milieu the criminal has been or is part of. I have been inspired by these narrative approaches in my interview technique. These approaches resonate with some methodological reflections from research on terrorism and radicalization. Juergensmeyer and M.K. Sheikh (2020: 5) argued that a challenge in research on radical Islamists is to "penetrate" into their worldviews. Their aim was to "enter religious minds," and to do this, they adopted Weber's notion of *verstehen*. This means understanding the thoughts and actions of radical Islamists from their own perspective. Their effort was to "take seriously the perspectives of the subjects in the social analysis of religious experiences" (Juergensmeyer & M.K. Sheikh 2020: 3). According to these researchers and their sociotheological approach, these religious experiences need to be located within their social context. Only in this way can we understand and take seriously "the social construction of the world as they perceive it" (Juergensmeyer & M.K. Sheikh 2020: 4; see also Dawson 2019).

I was guided by these observations when devising my interview technique. My technique can best be described as semi-structured interviews with a focus on

facilitating narratives. My interview guide consisted of questions divided into themes that followed the analytical focus of the study. These questions therefore revolved around the role of religion in their radicalization process, their radicalization process as part of a subcultural formation, and the gendered aspects of radicalization. However, the first question of the interviews focused on getting the interviewee to tell their own radicalization story in their own words and as detailed as possible. They were all asked the same initial question: *I would like to hear your own story. Can you tell me about how you became a radical Islamist?* The purpose of this question was to bring the interviewees' own understanding of their experiences to the forefront of the interview. Or, in the words of Speckhard (2009: 206), to "let them talk freely." In this way, the interviewees were able to talk about the aspects of their lives that they saw as relevant and as connected to their radicalization experience. The initial question animated the interviewees to talk. Some of them talked for over an hour without me asking follow-up questions. This technique to interviewing formers resembles what Juergensmeyer (2020: 61) called "informative conversations." His approach to interviewing radical Islamists was one that was not directed at the outset. The first part of the interviews or conversations had an "autobiographical" character, and then follow-up questions about the areas he was interested in would often come naturally (Juergensmeyer 2020: 62; see also Nilsson 2018: 427).

After the initial question, I steered the interview in the direction of the themes that I especially sought knowledge about but most often in connection to their own story about their radicalization experience. Sometimes, this simply involved asking encouraging follow-up questions and asking the interviewees to elaborate on what they had already talked about in order for them to continue their stories (see Chase 1995: 14; Sandberg 2018: 239). In the interviews with the converts, for example, I asked *What did your family think about your conversion?* and, if there were specific life crises, emotions, or frustrations connected to their conversions. Often, this had already come up, but it was a question that sparked reflections about identity and religion and was also a way to gain knowledge about the role of religion in their radicalization experience. Other times, I asked concrete questions from my interview guide on the themes I was interested in, both when they came as natural follow-up questions but also as a way to direct the interview towards my specific areas of interest. In relation to subculture as a theme, I asked questions about the style and symbols in the radical Islamist milieus they were part of and if this was something that had attracted them to these milieus. I also asked questions about the role of religion and, for example, if they saw themselves as especially righteous when they were part of the radical Islamist milieu, and how they then saw other Muslims and non-Muslims. In terms of gender, I, e.g., asked the female interviewees how it was to be a woman in a radical Islamist milieu (with strict gender roles) and if that was something that had attracted them to the milieu. In all instances, I encouraged them to tell me stories related to the questions from their time as radical Islamists.

But can we trust them? - And other ethical concerns

A central question in research on terrorism and radicalization has been whether or not we can trust what former or current radical Islamists say. James Khalil (2019) criticized what he believes is a tendency among researchers on terrorism and radicalization to uncritically take interviewee responses at face value. According to Khalil, researchers should cross-check with open source material to determine if what terrorists say is actually the truth (see also Horgan 2012; Speckhard 2009). Dawson (2019) criticized this approach to terrorists' accounts. He argued that, when the research aim is to gain knowledge about the terrorists' worldviews, it is irrelevant whether or not their claims are "true" or "fantastical" because this is what they perceive as reality and thus what forms their thoughts and actions (Dawson 2019: 80). So, even though terrorists present a "carefully choreographed image of themselves," we should treat this as data itself and as something that can provide knowledge about their identity and culture (Juergensmeyer 2020: 64). A central point must then be that we should not present our data as facts about the world but as the interviewees' subjective understanding of the world (Nilsson 2018: 429).

The aim of my interviews with the formers was to acquire knowledge about how they had understood the world when they were radical Islamists and what had preceded their entry into radical Islamist milieus and worldviews. I have no reason to believe that the formers tried to hide something from me or were deceitful in any other ways. I therefore did not see it as my task to double-check or verify their accounts of their radicalization experience. However, interviewing formers and asking them to produce narratives about their past, of course, involved a memory bias "as the interviewees talk about radical milieus they are no longer a part of, no longer agree with, and have an interest in distancing themselves from" (Article 4) in terms of social desirability. As noted in Article 4, "their retrospective accounts could, for example, thus be understood as a form of legitimisation of life choices that they now regret (cf. Sykes and Matza 1957)". But, there is a risk of memory bias and distortion issues in all retrospective accounts of behavior and thoughts. I consequently believe that the formers' accounts of their past should be extended the same credibility we would extend to other people in their retrospective accounts of their past (see Dawson 2019: 82).

Furthermore, using an interview technique designed to facilitate narratives required ethical considerations of the formers' psychological well-being. As already described, the formers could, to a large extent, be characterized as fragile interviewees that had entered radical Islamist milieus and adhered to worldviews and acted in ways that they later regretted and had to live with. A main ethical concern for me was that the interviewees should not feel psychological discomfort or harm in telling their stories. I clearly stated before the interviews what my research aim was and what the interview was about (as I had also done in our correspondence prior to the interviews). There was thus an "oral informed consent" prior to the interview (see Speckhard 2009: 204;

Nilsson 2018: 426), and the interviewees were told that, if they did not want to answer any specific question or wanted to stop the interview, they could. I also assured them that the interviews would be anonymized and they were going to be assigned pseudonyms (knowing that some of the formers had told their story in other contexts and that some people might be able to connect their story to the stories told in other contexts). One way to deal with the fragile interviewees and sensitive character of the topic was to be empathic and show emotions when they told about what they perceived as injustices, discrimination, or other personal crises. An example of perceived injustice was the case of Ali, who told about his experience with being forced out of his high school because of false accusations of him being a radical Islamist, and his accounts of his mother's death. Also, there was Jens's account of his father's psychopathic tendencies where he had locked Jens in a room with no lights, and his accounts of still being a victim of psychological and physical abuse from the radical Islamist milieu he had now left. And, Emelie, who towards the end of the interview, told about her family situation were her ex-husband, in her words, had tricked Emelie and taken their two daughters with him to a country in North Africa and that she had not been in contact with them for over three years. I believe that taking a neutral position towards the interviewees when they told about these sensitive and emotional accounts from their lives would have been perceived as cold-hearted and would have negatively affected the interviewees' desire to deliver personal accounts from their lives (see also Speckhard 2009: 215). Therefore, I actively showed emotions and expressions of care. However, even though there were times during the interviews where the interviewees seemed uncomfortable with having to relive and tell about their past, three of the interviewees after the interview said that the interview actually had been a kind of therapeutic experience for them. Concerning his interviews with former jihadists, Nilsson (2018: 425-426) described how his interviewees saw the interview as an opportunity to reflect aloud on experiences and feelings that they had carried with them for a long while. The formers that I interviewed expressed a similar experience from being interviewed about their past. Thus, my experience that they invested a lot in our conversation and that they seemed interested in telling their story was perhaps the result of them "using" the interview to reflect on emotions and experiences that they have been carrying around with them since they left the radical Islamist milieus. I do, of course, not know exactly how the interviewees felt about the interview experience in the time after the interview. My experience during the sessions and what they told me after the interview about their experience of being interviewed, however, indicates that they were not psychologically harmed by the interview or my questions.

An often discussed methodological and ethical issue regarding interviewing terrorists has been the moral concern about giving any credence to what terrorists have to say as it has been seen as ultimately being the same as excusing or sympathizing with their deviant views (for a critique of this criticism, see Horgan 2012; Dawson 2019). This issue can also be related to interviewing formers. The aim of the interviews with the formers was to understand what attracted them to radical Islamist worldviews and

milieus, and a special focus was the role of religion therein. Dawson (2019: 83) argued that the criticism of talking to terrorists is even more stark when we as researchers acknowledge the motivations of terrorists to be genuinely religious (in their own perception). This is in many ways what I did in the analysis of the interviews with the formers for Articles 3 and 4. It should be noted here that taking their religious motivations seriously is not the same as engaging in appeasement of their past behaviors or worldviews, nor do I wish to heroize their abandonment of the radical Islamist milieus and worldviews. The task has simply been to understand why and how they became radical Islamists. Here, it seems relevant to quote Dawson (2019: 83), who said, "we need to differentiate between recognizing their religiosity and the legitimacy of their beliefs. Accepting the former need not entail, in this case, accepting the latter." Thus, while I recognize and stress the importance of religiosity in the formers' radicalization experiences, I do not legitimate their former religious beliefs. Instead, I argue that, in order to prevent others from adhering to radical Islamist worldviews, it is of essence that we take seriously the religiosity of radical Islamists as this is part of what makes radical Islamism attractive to young people in the West. As discussed above, one of the most prominent reasons for the formers to participate in the interviews was that they hoped to be able to contribute with knowledge that, in the end, might help the prevention of radicalization. Even though I explained that the purpose was primarily to publish academic literature about radicalization processes and not explicitly about the prevention of radicalization, I hoped that the interviewees' accounts from their past could help in this regard.

Coding the interviews

The interview with the formers lasted 90 minutes on average. All the interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed in full by me, except for the interview with Svend, which was transcribed by a student assistant (I will get back to the interviews transcribed by student assistants below). The interviews were coded thematically (see Sandberg 2018: 243) using NVivo. This means that I first read the transcripts in their entirety to let the radicalization experiences of the formers be represented in their own terms. I then applied different categories or themes to their accounts. These were formed by the focus and theoretical approaches employed in the dissertation. The coding reflected the ambition of taking their narratives seriously while also having specific themes of interest.

4.4. INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSIONALS AND OTHER ACTORS RELATED TO THE ISSUE OF RADICALIZATION

The interviews with the current and former professionals working within the prevention of radicalization and other actors related to the issue of Islamist radicalization have been discussed in Article 5 in relation to positionality and the importance of careful wording when doing research on a sensitive and political topic. Thus, I will not delve further into these interviews in regard to these issues.

The interviews with the professionals and other actors followed a similar interview guide as the interviews with the formers. These interviews were also inspired by the narrative interview technique as the aim was to have the interviewees tell as specifically as they could, and were allowed to, about concrete cases of radicalization processes that they knew of. The interview guide also consisted of the areas of focus as the interviews with the formers, that is, the role of religion, subcultural aspects and formation, and gendered aspects of radicalization. The main difference was that the professionals and other actors had to talk about people other than themselves. These were then akin to expert interviews, as discussed in Article 5.

Transcription and coding of the interviews

The interviews lasted 90 minutes on average. I transcribed some of the interviews but 14 of the 18 interviews (19 including the interview with Svend) were transcribed by four student assistants. The assistants were all given the same written instruction on how to conduct the transcriptions. This was done to make the transcription as similar as possible. In cases where they could not hear or understand what was being said in the recorded interviews, the assistants were instructed to make a note in their transcription files stating the time code of the recordings. I then checked the recordings and added the sections of the transcriptions that they could not hear or understand. One of the assistants has a Muslim background. She was therefore assigned the interviews with the interviewees with Muslim backgrounds, such as representatives from mosques. In this way, she could help translate the Arabic words that the interviewees sometimes used, which I did not understand, and she could explain certain meanings of phrases. All student assistants were instructed to maintain complete secrecy about what the interviewees had said in the interviews. They were given USB sticks with the recording of the interviews and were instructed to only save their transcription file on these USB sticks, which were then handed back to me at the end of their transcription.

I coded the interviews in two ways. First, I conducted the same thematic coding as I had done for the interviews with the formers. These themes were discussed and analyzed together with the interviews with the formers in Article 4. Second, as I read each of the interviews in its own terms, I noted several common methodological themes. These themes reflected the interviewee's opinion about the concept of radicalization and interviewer/interviewee positionality in the interview interaction. These themes were then discussed in Article 5.

4.5. USE OF ALTERNATIVE SOURCES AND METHODS

As a way to battle the problem of gaining access to the hard-to-reach field of radicalization, this dissertation has explored alternative data sources as part of the empirical bricolage. Poul Duedahl and Michael H. Jacobsen (2012) argued for the use of what they called "discrete methods" (my translation). Discrete methods offer an

explorative approach where the researcher can draw freely on the accessible material that the researcher believes can help shed light on the research question (Duedahl & Jacobsen 2012: 174). Duedahl and Jacobsen (2012: 183) also mentioned that researchers in social science have often seen discrete methods as a necessary evil before employing more conventional methods. However, I argue that, in the field of radicalization research, alternative methods and data sources are often necessary but never evil, when we take into account the hard-to-reach character of the research subjects. The following will describe the use of biographical and journalistic sources and virtual ethnographic-inspired internet research as examples of relevant alternative data sources and methods.

4.5.1. BIOGRAPHICAL AND JOURNALISTIC SOURCES

Yvonne Mørck (1995: 123) emphasized that empirical bricolages involve being aware of the many different phenomena that can be used as empirical material. Some empirical materials can be more primary or comprehensive than others, but they all play a part in painting the whole empirical picture of the research. As part of its empirical bricolage, this dissertation has drawn on different biographical texts on known radical Islamists and journalistic sources that include knowledge about cases of Islamist radicalization processes. This method resembles what has been termed the "historical method" (see Duedahl & Jacobsen 2012: 183) or "document analysis" (see Duedahl & Jacobsen 2010). Document analysis has often been used by historians to gain insight into historical contexts, but in a broader sense, documents can be defined as any reference to items that carry information (Duedahl & Jacobsen 2010). The different texts on known radical Islamists that this dissertation has drawn on can thus be described as documents in the sense that they carry information about the radicalization processes of young people from the West. Some of these books have been used explicitly in some of the articles of this dissertation (J. Sheikh 2015; Seierstad 2016; Albæk, Dalsgaard & Rée 2019), while others have been used as background material to gain knowledge about processes of radicalization (Soei 2018; Khaja 2017). Jakob Sheikh is a Danish journalist with a Muslim background who managed to gain the trust of several Danish radical Islamists many of whom became foreign fighters. His book is a portrait of their radicalization processes. Åsne Seierstad is a Norwegian journalist and writer. Her book is about the radicalization process of two sisters with a Somali background living in Norway who joined ISIS and their radicalization process. Mette M. Albæk, Louise Dalsgaard, and Natascha R. Mikkelsen are Danish journalists who have written a book about the life and radicalization of the Danish citizen Omar el-Hussein with a Palestinian background, who committed a terror attack in 2015 (see also Soei 2018; Khaja 2017). These books have provided valuable insights about radicalization processes of young people living in Scandinavia. They have thus been "documents" that have carried information. Furthermore, source criticism is an inherent part of doing document analysis. The main task is to be able to critically assess the text in order to be able to sort and evaluate the statements in the text that are of relevance to the research question

(Duedahl & Jacobsen 2012: 186). The biographical and journalistic sources used in this dissertation have all thoroughly described how they collected their data and whom they talked to. Even when applying a hermeneutics of suspicion, they seemed like valid sources. Journalists, such as the authors of the material used in this dissertation, are often some of the few people who have contacts in hard-to-reach groups such as radical Islamists. Using materials from journalists who are known to have relationships of trust with radical Islamists can provide insights that researchers might never be able to gain by themselves. The biographical and journalistic sources have been valuable for this dissertation, even though when compared with the interviews and the virtual ethnographic-inspired internet research, they have been a less comprehensive or secondary data source.

4.5.2. VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY-INSPIRED INTERNET RESEARCH

Another important part of the empirical bricolage has been virtual ethnography-inspired internet research. The focus on terrorist organizations' online propaganda has been a central part of the research field in recent years, not least since the emergence of ISIS, which has become known for being especially professional in their propaganda. In fact, some researchers have argued that ISIS has sought to establish a "virtual caliphate" where social media platforms have become key elements in disseminating ISIS propaganda and recruiting new members (see, e.g., Bloom & Daymon 2018; Winter 2015; Awan 2017). Such analysis of the propaganda of terrorist organizations has often been instrumental in character and focused on how their propaganda has a specific aim of recruiting new members. My approach was different. Instead of focusing on terrorist organizations' instrumental propaganda, I focused on the cultural creativity and stylistic repertoire of the broader environments supportive of jihadism. In other words, this dissertation has sought to understand and theorize jihadi subculture through subcultural artifacts, symbols, and style on the internet. Thus, instead of understanding the internet as an instrumental tool for recruitment, the present dissertation understands the internet as a place where culture is formed and reformed (see Hine 2000: 9).

My approach has been inspired by what Christine Hine (2000) has called *virtual ethnography.* Whereas ethnography is about understanding a group of people's culture, interactions, thoughts, and perceptions of the world, the aim of virtual ethnography is the same, except that it specifically explores groups, culture, and interaction on the internet (Hine 2000; Larsen 2012: 238). Hine (2000) defined virtual ethnography as a way to join an internet site for a longer period of time, and interact with the people who use the site and thereby establish a detailed understanding of how the site is used to create and maintain relationships (Larsen & Glud 2013: 69). I have not interacted with users, and in this regard, my approach differs from virtual ethnography. However, my approach is inspired by virtual ethnography's focus on understanding culture. Malene C. Larsen and Louise N. Glud (2013: 73) have noted that the use of new media can give access to otherwise hidden cultures. Paraphrasing

this, we can say that new media can give access to and knowledge about otherwise hard-to-reach groups, such as those in broader jihadi subculture. Sites that consist of user-generated content, such as YouTube, present an opportunity to be creative and experiment in our approach to qualitative studies (Larsen & Glud 2013: 69). Furthermore, they present a way to gain knowledge of and insight into the culture of those who share content on these sites. The analysis of jihadi rap and the theorization on the attraction of radical Islamism discussed in Articles 1 and 2 should thus be seen as being generated through a creative approach to qualitative studies and as a way to gain insight in to the "hidden" or hard-to-reach broader jihadi subculture.

On finding jihadi rap online

According to Larsen (2012: 236), internet researchers piece together their research project with the data sources they find relevant in relation to their research question. The choices internet researchers make are often based on arbitrary decisions, which come to shape the boundaries of the research project (Hine 2000: 62). According to Hine (2000), virtual ethnography often resembles what she called *connective ethnography.* Instead of fixating on one site, researchers should focus on the flow among sites and their content. Within connective ethnography, the researcher typically employs a form of snowballing where one finding in the field can lead to new findings. In other words, this is an approach where we as researchers have to be open towards the changeability and fluid character of the field. We cannot decide in advance which empirical sources are useful or which sites or media are useful. The design of our study, as a result, is something that develops as we conduct the research (Larsen & Glud 2013: 71).

The online methodological approach employed in this dissertation is inspired by the virtual ethnographic or connective ethnographic approach to internet research. As stated in Article 1, "this methodology is appropriate for the study of jihadi rap because jihadi rap is a diffuse and fluid phenomenon, which is hard to circumscribe or fix as a traditional research subject that can be identified in well-defined spaces" (Article 1: 426). The following will describe how the different jihadi rap songs and videos employed and analyzed in Articles 1 and 2 were found.

The starting point of the internet research was a Google search on words and phrases such as "hip-hop and Islam." The internet research that ended up being about jihadi rap started more broadly and focused on how Islam had been employed in hip-hop in general. Researching the connection between hip-hop and Islam, however, led to journalistic sites and blogs about jihadi rap. This entailed a more detailed focus of the internet research on jihadist elements in the newer subgenres of hip-hop. The search on hip-hop and Islam ultimately led to searches on "jihadi hip-hop" and "jihadi rap." This resembled what Hine (2000: 62) described as the often arbitrary decisions that come to shape the boundaries of one's research project when doing internet research, and that we cannot in advance decide which empirical sources are useful to us. The

jihadi rap songs mentioned on the journalistic sites and blogs were the starting points. Following the links to the songs led to the video-sharing site, YouTube, and other streaming media where I was able to locate other songs. This was, in part, a result of the nature of the internet and social media. Algorithms on sites such as YouTube ensure that similar videos as the one you are watching will be available to you. This is also an example of the snowballing effect where watching one video will lead to another video.

The first music video that I found, which was mentioned on one of the blogs, was Sheikh Terra and the Soul Salah Crew's song "Dirty Kuffar," which is one of the most well-known jihadi rap songs. Searching for "jihadi rap" also produced several links to the song on YouTube. This song was used in the analysis of Articles 1 and 2. The other song by Sheikh Terra and the Soul Salah Crew, which was discussed in Article 2, is the introductory song to the documentary entitled "Malcolm X: The Prince of Islam." This song, and the accompanying documentary, were found through searches for Sheikh Terra and the Soul Salah Crew. This led to a discussion forum on a far right-wing site called Stormfront.[5] In a forum thread from 2007, the user "12monk" provided links to Sheikh Terra and the Soul Salah Crew. Some of the links were not working any longer, but eventually I found a working link to the documentary.[6] This was another example of how the design of one's internet research is developed as the research is conducted and of the fluid and changeable character of the field. The internet research on jihadi rap was characterized by a trial and error process of finding the relevant empirical material (songs and videos) and the working links as the songs are continually deleted from the various websites and social media because of the explicit jihadist content.

Another of the more well-known artists included in Articles 1 and 2 is Deso Dogg. When searching for 'jihadi rap', Deso Dogg is one of the first names that appears on the list. I found several journalistic sources that had written about him and his music and his journey to becoming a member of ISIS.[7] As a prominent ISIS member involved in their propaganda production and an example of the often discussed convergence between street culture and jihadist milieus, Deso Dogg was of interest in my search to understand the broader jihadi subculture. I immersed myself in the descriptions and knowledge about his life. Doing a search on YouTube for his name provided several rap songs from his time as a rapper in Germany. When listening to these gangsta rap-style songs, YouTube also provided links to *anashid* that he had performed while being a member of ISIS. One of the anashid was "Wacht doch auf!," which is included in the analysis in Article 1. This nashid was used in a sample on the

[5] https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t417762/ link visited March 2, 2020.

[6] https://archive.org/details/Malcom_X_Prince_of_Islam link visited March 2, 2020.

[7] E.g., http://www.thefader.com/2016/08/02/isis-denis-cuspert-deso-dogg-rapper link visited March 2, 2020.

album "Straight Outta Syria." From this album, the songs "#fuckwithmeyouknowimhelal" and ""Pepsi, Basmati und Kuffr" are included in Articles 1 and 2. I found the album while doing an in-depth search on the music by Deso Dogg. After visiting several sites with links to other sites, I eventually ended up visiting a hip-hop discussion forum, where the user "Didier" in a post from around 2015 provided a link to the album.[8] I ultimately found the album on the music streaming website Audiomack.[9]

A third jihadi rap group that is included in Articles 1 and 2 is The Mujahideen Team. Their album "Clash of Civilizations" containing the songs "Blue Nile," "Gun Fire Sound," and "Day of Retribution" was mentioned on one of the journalistic sites and blogs, and I found the album on a music streaming service.

The above songs are all discussed in Articles 1 and 2. I have, however, seen videos and listened to several other jihadi rap songs available on the internet. The criteria for choosing which songs to include in the analysis in the articles were that they had either an explicitly jihadist message or that they in other ways provided valuable insight into the broader jihadi subculture. This was the case with the song "Blue Nile'" which is not jihadist as such but provides insight into views on gender and masculinity. Several songs were left out of the analysis. This was determined by the limit of how many songs could be included within the scope of the articles and because the songs included in the analysis had to be seen as songs illustrative of the genre of jihadi rap. The included songs also have a substantial number of listeners (for instance, the song "Dirty Kuffar" had over 100,000 views on YouTube at the time of writing).

The aim of the virtual ethnographic-inspired internet research was to gain insight into the symbolic and stylistic cultural repertoire of jihadi subculture and to provide a basis for a theorization of its attraction. I have a recording of all the songs and took several screenshots to document the style and artistic messages of the songs and visual expression of style. Screenshots are normal practice when conducting virtual ethnography and should be seen as a form of digital field notes (see Larsen 2012). In the case of content containing jihadist messages, there was even more reason to thoroughly document the material as it is continually deleted from various websites.

I did not conduct a formal coding of the material as the empirical material was visual and in the form of lyrics in songs. However, I viewed the videos and listened to the lyrics first and then analyzed the material through the lens of subcultural theory and concepts such as bricolage, style, and resistance. In this way, I attempted to strike a

[8] http://www.kanyetothe.com/forum/index.php?topic=2876433.0 link visited March 2, 2020.

[9] https://audiomack.com/album/trapspotsyria/straight-outta-syria link visited March 2, 2020.

balance between a theoretical reading and an empirical openness as suggested in virtual ethnographic research.

CHAPTER 5. MAIN FINDINGS

This chapter will present the main findings of the research articles. As discussed in chapter 1, a criticism within the academic discussion of radicalization has rightly been that the travelling of the concept of radicalization from policy-making to academia has caused an ethnification, individualization, and psychologization of the process of radicalization. In other words, radicalization has been understood as driven by *individual push factors* or deficits. Some researchers have, however, answered this criticism by emphasizing the importance of structural factors, such as economic and social marginalization, in radicalization processes. This has often led to structural perspectives that end up arguing that radicalization is driven by *structural push factors*. This dissertation offers a *third* space in radicalization research as it focusses on and theorizes the *attraction* of radical Islamism. Therefore, the focus is on *pull factors*. However, as the findings of the research articles showed, we have to take into account micro-, meso-, and macrolevel explanations, in order to understand the pull factors. The aim of the dissertation, which the articles all deliver a part of the answer to, has been to *understand and theorize the attraction of radical Islamism given specific social and societal circumstances*. The overall research question was: *How can we theorize the attraction of radical Islamism in the West?* This dissertation has analytically understood and discussed radicalization in the specific light of processes of subcultural formation and processes of development of religious emotions. The following will present and discuss the main findings of the articles focusing on radicalization as subcultural formation and then the articles focusing on radicalization as development of religious emotions.

5.1. RADICALIZATION AS SUBCULTURAL FORMATION: MAIN FINDINGS[10]

Through a subcultural perspective and the empirical material of jihadi rap, Articles 1 and 2 contribute to the understanding and theorization of what can be attractive in adhering to such a worldview.

The aim of Article 1 is twofold: 1) to discuss the relevance of a subcultural approach to the study of jihadism and 2) to illustrate the relevance of this approach through an analysis of jihadi rap. To explore this aim, the article employs a CCCS-inspired approach to subcultures. However, following Jensen (2018a), the article argues that a rethinking and renewal of subcultural theory may be achieved through a dialogue with intersectionality. Pertaining to the first part of the twofold aim of the article, the article argues that the relevance of a subcultural approach to the study of jihadism can be found in viewing jihadism as a subculture that provides an "answer" to problems

[10] The following resembles formulations and arguments from Articles 1 and 2.

pertaining to participants' shared social position. The article argues that jihadi subculture offers a cultural answer situated in a socially complex way, offering a viable identity for the participants. By viewing jihadism as a subculture, we are thus aided in understanding and theorizing why becoming a participant in such a subculture can be attractive.

To further illustrate the relevance of a subcultural approach to jihadism, Article 1 analyzes one of the hybrid forms of cultural expression central to jihadi subculture, namely jihadi rap music. The article finds that jihadi rap is a way to express resistance through a creative cultural bricolage of different and often contradictory cultural styles, and that jihadi rap can be interpreted as the explicit manifestation of a broader collective, oppositional, and subcultural answer to a shared situation of experienced othering. The argument is that an analysis of subcultural styles, such as jihadi rap, is important in its own right as it contributes to the study of the broader cultural and social ecology of a jihadi subculture. Jihadi rap can thus be understood as part of what makes jihad attractive among some young Muslims in the West, contributing to research on jihadi cool (Sageman 2008) and to the theorization of the attraction of radical Islamism in the West.

The convergence between street culture and jihadi culture is further explored in Article 2. The purpose of Article 2 is to explain what makes jihadi subculture cool or attractive by analyzing the historical relationship between hip-hop and Islam through the same subcultural perspective as applied in Article 1, which allows a grasp of the aesthetic fascination of jihadism. The article traces the employment of Islam in hip-hop to recent developments of jihadi rap. Within jihadi rap, we observe a form of bricolage that mixes and combines hip-hop musical style, the symbolism of US Black Islam, and jihadism, and the article argues that this type of stylistic appropriation of hip-hop coolness is part of what makes jihadi rap – and, in a broader sense, jihadi subculture – aesthetically and stylistically cool and therefore attractive.

5.2. RADICALIZATION AS DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS: MAIN FINDINGS[11]

Articles 3 and Article 4 focus on the role of religion in Islamist radicalization processes. In these articles, it is argued that the role of religion is often downplayed in the research on radicalization. Article 3 suggests a theorization of how we can reinstate religion in the analysis, and Article 4 utilizes this theorization in the analysis of the interviews with formers and other actors linked to the issue of radicalization.

Article 3 explores how we can reinstate religion in the analysis of Islamist radicalization in the West by introducing and developing the *sociology of religious emotion* (Riis & Woodhead 2010). The application of the sociology of religious

[11] The following resembles formulations and arguments from Articles 3 and 4.

emotion enables a synthesis of opposing explanations of radicalization as it offers a way to understand how social and political contexts can be connected to religiosity. The article argues that retheorizing the understanding of underprivileged ethno-class experiences as a root cause of radicalization through Riis and Woodhead's perspective enables an understanding of how such experiences are able to be transformed into religious emotions. What might have been personal feelings of anger towards society can be transformed into strong religious emotions in radical Islamist groups, which in some cases can initiate and amplify religiously based motivations to endorse or commit violence. The article furthermore argues that this meaningfulness of emotions can be experienced as a form of empowerment through an understanding of being part of a group of a "chosen few" and that underprivileged ethno-class experiences can be interpreted as a form of test from God resulting in emotional experiences of empowerment. The article consequently helps theorize and render intelligible why adhering to radical interpretations of Islam can be attractive to some young Muslims.

Article 4 investigates the connection between certain context-specific experiences and specific interpretations of Islam that can initiate and amplify radicalization by drawing on the interview material and analyzing the five in-depth interviews with formers. The article seeks to answer two questions: *Why did they become religious?* and *What characterized the processes of radicalization in the radical Islamist groups they became part of?*

The analysis finds that the formers differed in reasons for becoming religious partly due to four of them being converts to Islam. However, common to most of them was that becoming religious was linked to personal family background and life situations. They felt emotions such as confusion, anger, and loneliness because of doubt about existential questions, lack of sense of belonging, experiences of troublesome family backgrounds, and discrimination – in other words, they were cognitively open (Wiktorowicz 2005) to new understandings of themselves and society. Religion in different ways provided them with answers to these emotions.

An analytical finding explained in Article 4 is that a cognitive opening is not necessarily limited to a rather short period after experiencing a form of crisis. Common to all the formers was that their state of cognitive openness was still present when they entered the radical groups and when they were part of them. In other words, religious emotional regimes within radical Islamist groups amplified and initiated the formers' radicalization. They felt they were a better version of themselves and that they were better than all others. The article finds that there are social causes for seeking religion, but also that religiosity affects the social – the religious emotions within the groups create a tight-knit community of adherents who understand themselves as (the only true) righteous believers. Article 4 concludes that the radicalization process of the formers was characterized by this interplay.

5.3. LINKING THE FINDINGS BETWEEN RADICALIZATION AS SUBCULTURAL FORMATION AND RADICALIZATION AS DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS: FOCUS ON ATTRACTION

Even though the focuses on radicalization as subcultural formation and radicalization as development of religious emotions are treated separately in the articles, there are important links between the findings. In this respect, the dissertation argues that in order to understand the attraction of radical Islamism, it is fruitful to include the broader supportive milieu and not just the perpetrators of actual violence. This is linked to the question of how we can theorize the attraction of radical Islamism in the West. The articles show that theorizing the attraction through a subcultural perspective allows us to understand how broader jihadi subculture can provide an answer to shared situations related to the social position and experiences of the participants in the subculture and how jihadi subculture holds an aesthetic appeal. From the outside, the attraction of radical Islamism in the West can seem incomprehensible, but theorizing the attraction through a subcultural perspective enables an understanding of how radical Islamism can be considered attractive *from within*. Furthermore, the articles show that we can theorize the attraction through the perspective of the sociology of religious emotions. This perspective provides an understanding of how part of the subcultural answer can also be *religious* answers or reactions to problems related to specific social positions and experiences, and it allows an understanding of the empowering effects of strong religious emotions and how these can be connected to radicalization. Furthermore, it offers a theorization of (and a way to take seriously) the role of religion in Islamist radicalization processes, which has often been downplayed in the research field.

Combined, the four articles illustrate that jihadi subculture can provide an answer to social marginalization or othering, but also to more existential questions, lack of a sense of belonging and experiences of troublesome family backgrounds. The attraction of radical Islamism can thus be on different levels, but they are all related to subcultural answers provided in jihadi subculture and its aesthetic appeal. The articles all help to answer the research question of how we can theorize the attraction of radical Islamism in the West. They do so by situating the attraction as a third space between explanations of radicalization that either focus on microlevel explanations or macrolevel explanations. The argument that can be derived across all articles is that, in order to understand the attraction of radical Islamism in the West, we need to take into account the social and societal context. Based on the empirical material, the articles and the dissertation as a whole offer a theorization on the attraction of radical Islamism that synthetizes different theoretical understandings and explanations of radicalization. The formation of religious emotions takes place in a subcultural milieu. This is part of the context in which individuals form their religiosity. Based on the empirical material, this dissertation offers a theorization of how the process of formation of strong religious emotions can and should be understood as a collective

process occurring in the context of a jihadi subcultural milieu. In this way, this dissertation's focus on attraction calls for more research that combines micro-, meso-, and macrolevel understandings of radicalization.

The dissertation, as a whole, therefore contributes to the understanding and theorization of the pull-factors associated to Islamist radicalization processes in the West.

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